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An Aesthetics for Comedy

by

Mary Fae McKay

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INTRODUCTION

What is comedy? This is a recurrent inquiry of philosophers, aestheticians, and psychologists; it is a constant concern of writers, performers, and wits; it is a persistent puzzle for readers, theater-goers, and people with a good sense of humor. The category comedy includes a wide range of productions. The medium of comedy can be pure action, as in slapstick or mime; it can be a combination of action and words, as in dramatic comedies; or it can be purely verbal, as in puns or parodies. Comedy ranges from meaningfulness, as in Shakespeare's philosophical comedy or Shaw's comedy of ideas; through silliness, as in farce or nonsense poems; to meaningfulness, as in black comedy. The purpose of comedy can be hostile, as in practical jokes, cutting wit, or ridicule; it can be seductive, as in fabliaux or romantic comedies; or it can be soothing, as in humor. What is the common core that causes us to consider such a variety of productions as falling under the category comedy? What is the basic form of comedy? A good way to approach this question is by considering comic responses. It is generally agreed that laughter is the characteristic response to comedy, but, of course, it is not our
invariable response. We may smile satisfiedly or snort bitterly, or perhaps our response remains in the mind and is not expressed visibly or audibly. Still, we can recognize the relationship of these responses and ask, "What is the nature of the comic response?" Thus, by considering the two interrelated questions, "What is the basic form of comedy?" and "What is the nature of the comic response?" we can arrive at an answer to the question, "What is comedy?"

The kind of aesthetics that will enable us to get at answers to questions like these is the kind that Kenneth Burke describes in *The Philosophy of Literary Form*. Basically this aesthetics sees literature as symbolic action; that is, a work of literature adopts a strategy to encompass a situation.¹ This basic definition, along with Burke's discussion in which he emphasizes ritual drama, leads us back to those who have tried to discover the bases of art through anthropology. Jane Ellen Harrison in *Ancient Art and Ritual* argues convincingly that art grows out of ritual, that it is a representation of an attempt to control a situation, for instance, a representation of a ritual rain dance intended to bring forth the spring rains needed to nurture the new crops.² Gilbert Murray supports this idea with his *Excur sus on the Ritual Forms preserved in Greek Tragedy*,

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² For more on this, see Jane Ellen Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), ch. 2.
showing how Greek tragedy can be traced back to the fertility ritual involving a dying and rising god. Francis Macdonald Cornford in *The Origin of Attic Comedy* then indicates how Greek comedy can be traced back to the same ritual. As germinal as are these ideas on the origin of art and the origin of the particular art form we are investigating, they should not tie us so inextricably and exclusively to the examples used to support them. Both Harrison and Cornford make the mistake of too narrow an application of the general idea they have developed. Harrison mentions that Peisistratos brought to Greek drama Homeric subjects, but he glosses over this addition, indicating that though the characters were new, the basic plot, that from the fertility ritual, remained the same. Cornford has been scored for the distortions he makes in the basic plot in order to fit all of Aristophanes' comedies to it. Harrison and Cornford, then, both limit and weaken the idea that art arises from ritual by dwelling on only one basic plot. Surely even in ancient times human life was sufficiently complex as to provide more than one situation calling forth a strategy first of ritual and later of art, and I would maintain that while some plots are sufficiently basic as to remain with human beings throughout the ages, others arise from new situations created by the development of the human society.
However, an enumeration of such plots will also lead us away from the answers we are seeking if it does not retain the sense that such plots are literary representations of psychological strategies intended to encompass situations. Such a classification is given us by Northrop Frye. His rejection of the aid of other sciences such as anthropology and psychology causes him sometimes to describe an incidental structure, one that is certainly there in the comedy but that is unrelated to the essential structure which calls for a comic response such as laughter, and other times to describe the essential structure without acknowledging its ritual basis. Frye's brilliant classification of plots may be useful to us as categorization, perhaps of those sad and happy stories that lie between tragedy and comedy but lack their cathartic effect. It will not answer our essential questions as to the nature of comic catharsis and the structure of the comedy that evokes it. More suggestive is C. L. Barber's examination of Shakespeare's festive comedies because he explains the connections of these plays to saturnalian ritual in that the plays dramatize "pleasure as release from normal limitations," and he grounds the saturnalian attitude in psychology--"the energy normally occupied in maintaining inhibition is freed for celebration."
Comedy's Doubleness

A theory of comedy which approaches its basic form through the test of the comic response is that proposed by Henri Bergson in his essay "Laughter." His conception of the double structure of the laughable, a contrast between the human and the mechanical, is suggestive both in its generality and in the specific manifestations he traces through the comic of forms, movements, situations, words, and character. The audience's necessary perception of this contrast is a statement about the psychology of comedy that I am inclined to accept. But Bergson goes on to make a statement about the social nature of comedy in which he confuses effect and cause. The effect of laughter may well be the correction of the comic character's rigidity, but it does not follow that the cause of laughter is the audience's pleasure at seeing this socialization take place. Bergson's theory chimes with George Meredith's earlier and most humane "An Essay on Comedy" in this emphasis on the pleasure of socialization. But I must argue against both of these attractive theorists that it is the character's deviation from the norm which itself causes the laughter. If Bergson and Meredith were right in seeing the correction as the source of our laughter, then the end of a play, the part in which this resolution occurs, would be the
only part at which we laughed or at least the part at which we laughed the most heartily. In fact we laugh throughout a comedy, perhaps least at the ending, which has often proved to be a problem to playwright, producer, and critic.

**Comedy as Play**

Deviation from the norm as the cause of our laughter at comedy can be more graphically understood if we compare comedy to another area of human life, one which is characterized by deviation from the norm and which often excites laughter, play. Bergson himself hints at a connection between play and comedy. He not only uses various children's toys to illustrate the comic combination of "the illusion of life with the distinct impression of a mechanical arrangement"; he also makes the general statement, "Now, comedy is a game, a game that imitates life."  

Elizabeth Sewell in *The Field of Nonsense* makes a similar connection for nonsense. While she distinguishes Nonsense from Humour and the Comic, she indicates that its form and the pleasure derived from it are those of a game.  

Sigmund Freud, too, is tantalized by play as an explanation of later enjoyment of comedy. He indicates that children's play with words and thoughts, while probably serving the need for mastery, is also the first stage of jokes.  

He later uses the comparison of
an adult's ego to a child's ego in his explanation of the comic,\textsuperscript{13} and in his further essay upon "Humour" he describes it in terms of a parental super-ego comforting a childlike ego.\textsuperscript{14} These theorists might have made better use of the comparison of comedy to play had they had a more adequate conception of play to rely on. Such a conception is provided by Jean Piaget in \textit{Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood}. He sees imitation as behavior that is oriented toward the pole of accommodation, accommodation of the ego to things, while play is behavior oriented toward the opposite pole, that of assimilation, assimilation of things to the ego.\textsuperscript{15} This vital distinction might have prevented Bergson's mistake of emphasizing a comic character's final conformity rather than his interim eccentricity as the source of our laughter. Freud, like Bergson, saw play as basically imitation. Had he been able to rely on Piaget's more adequate and nearly opposite explanation, he might have seen the comic as based less on economy of thought and more on the unfettered expression of the ego. Piaget classifies children's games into the early stage of practice games, the middle and most characteristic stage of symbolic games, and the late stage of games with rules. This classification might have allowed Sewell to reconcile her own view of nonsense with the rejected attitude of
those who "regard Nonsense as an annihilation of relations, either of language or experience, and . . . enjoy it as a delectable and infinite anarchy knowing no rules, liberating the mind from any form of order or system."16 Sewell clearly describes nonsense as a game with rules. That nonsense which is comic can be seen as having an especially large component of assimilation and thus being more closely connected with the previous stage of symbolic games than with the later development of social adaptation. Thus, while comic nonsense is like the rest of nonsense in following rules, it does create a sense of freedom in that the creator of comic nonsense is playing by his own rules in contradistinction to any set of rules imposed on him from without.

Johan Huizinga brings together many of these ideas in *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture.* He moves the boundaries of play far back in that he sees play as the basis of ritual, which, with Harrison, he sees as the subsequent basis of art, and he moves play's boundaries far forward in that he sees it as a basic element in all of man's cultural achievements. Within these all-encompassing boundaries he notes the characteristics of play. While Huizinga objects to most of the biological and psychological interpretations of play as assuming that play has some extrinsic purpose,
I think he would agree with Piaget's definition of play as "unaccommodated assimilation" as is indicated by his emphasis on the voluntariness of play even saying that play "is in fact freedom."

Huizinga, in discussing the relationship of play and the comic, says, "All the terms in this loosely connected group of ideas--play, laughter, folly, wit, jest, joke, the comic, etc.--share the characteristic which we had to attribute to play, namely, that of resisting any attempt to reduce it to other terms. Their rationale and their mutual relationships must lie in a very deep layer of our mental being." However supporting this statement is to the thesis that play lies at the heart of comedy, we have still the task of differentiating comedy from man's other cultural products. Huizinga provides us with an essential clue when he emphasizes how the playing group is allowed saturnalian license. He further describes the rebellious nature of comedy when he indicates that those spoil-sports who shatter one play-world and are excluded from it often go on to form a new community of outlaws, revolutionaries, cabalists, or heretics.17

Huizinga's idea of the rebellious aspect of play is related to humor in a clear but unusual way by Constance Rourke. In American Humor: A Study of the National Character she indicates how rebellion begets rebellion in
American history and American literature. In the first three chapters of her book she deals with the typically American "characters" the Yankee peddler, the backwoodsman, and the Negro slave. She shows how each of them was a rebel, even an outcast. "Each in a fashion of his own had broken bonds, the Yankee in the initial revolt against the parent civilization, the backwoodsman in revolt against all civilization, the Negro in a revolt which was cryptic and submerged but which none the less made a perceptible outline." She indicates how each of them used comedy as a defense against, even an affirmation in the face of, the difficulties, even terrors, in front of them. "Comic resilience swept through them in waves, transcending the past, transcending terror, with the sense of comedy, itself a wild emotion."18

**Comedy as Escape from Repression**

The theorist who has most clearly delineated the rebellious streak in comedy is Sigmund Freud. His explanation of "The Mechanism of Pleasure and the Psychogenesis of Jokes" is that "the pleasure in jokes exhibits a core of original pleasure in play and a casing of pleasure in lifting inhibitions."19 He explains the burst of pleasure that often exhibits itself in a laugh as a yield corresponding to the psychical expenditure, normally used to maintain the inhibition, that is saved
by the joke.20 For the word **inhibition** we may substitute the term **suppression**, at times the stronger word **repression**, at others the more external reference **oppression**, and even the common term we have been using, **rules**.

Inserting Piaget's conception of play into Freud's musings on the connection between comedy and play gives Freud's theory a greater unity. Freud's revelation of the purpose of jokes as aggression has led his followers to discuss wit as a strictly negative thing. Piaget's concept of assimilation enables us to see that aggression more neutrally as self-assertion. Freud's explanation of the mechanism of jokes as a saving of psychical energy normally used to maintain an inhibition and his localization of jokes in the unconscious lead him to emphasize such economy as the link between innocent and tendentious jokes and to see economies in other psychical locales as the common factor between jokes and the comic and humor. Piaget's criticism of Freud's speaking of the unconscious and the conscious as regions of the psyche and his own insistence on conceiving the unconscious, preconscious, and conscious as forming a continuum enable us to see a more important connection between these varieties of comedy. Like tendentious jokes, innocent jokes and the comic and humor all have obstacles
to overcome, though they may be conscious as well as unconscious ones. This leaves intact the idea of the common core of comedy as the individual expressing himself against the restraints of the social group.

Piaget's own criticism of Freud's framework and my modification of Freud's ideas about comedy by applying Piaget's conception of play are quite in keeping with the tentative, suggestive expression of Freud's theories. I believe Freud would have been unhappy with the dogmatic application of the specifics of his theories by his followers. This would, I think, be true of the tendency by some psychoanalytic critics to reduce works of literature to toilet-training traumas or Oedipal complexes. But I believe Freud would have appreciated Lionel Trilling's confronting theory with theory. Trilling's essay "Freud and Literature" illustrates the best kind of utilization of Freud's theories in literary criticism. Trilling's contention that a work of literature is not merely the product of the author's thought but the very instrument of it is in keeping with our view of literature as symbolic action. And his juxtaposition of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* with Aristotle's notion of tragic catharsis produces a conception of tragedy's function which is more positive and which stresses the sense of active mastery which
tragedy can give.\textsuperscript{21} We would do well to follow this example of how to use Freud's psychoanalytical theories in the development of aesthetic theory.

The formulation of comedy as a rebellion of the individual against the norms of society suggests a connection between comedy and satire. Indeed much satire seems akin to comedy in that it evokes the characteristic comic response, laughter. But satiric response ranges from the laughter of ridicule through bitter laughter to a feeling so totally negative that no kind of laughter can express it. Such satiric responses no doubt relate to the satirist's didactic purpose, a purpose far different from the pleasure-seeking of comedy. But the perception of such purpose lies with the audience, and the audience's own security about the norm being temporarily rebelled against, as in comedy, or didactically attacked, as in satire, may cause the same work to be differently categorized. It may therefore be useful to consider comedy, satire, and revolution as together forming a scale with comedy defined as "symbolic action," satire as "symbolic action," and revolution as action itself.

The same formulation raises the question of the difference between comedy and tragedy. Albert Cook finds a clear contrast between the two and even manages to
tabulate their characteristics in opposing columns in *The Dark Voyage and the Golden Mean: A Philosophy of Comedy*. However, his metaphorical characterization of tragedy as the dark voyage and comedy as the golden mean, his association of tragedy with the wonderful and comedy with the probable, his insistence that tragedy emphasizes the individual and comedy the society make too sharp a differentiation and are certainly depreciatory of comedy and probably unfair to tragedy as well. The similarity that both comedy and tragedy involve a conflict between the individual and society is more convincing than the differences Cook finds.

**Comedy as Affirmation**

Susanne K. Langer comes closer to discriminating between comedy and tragedy when she describes the comic and tragic rhythms. She describes so well the spirit of comedy with statements like, "This human life-feeling is the essence of comedy. It is at once religious and ribald, knowing and defiant, social and freakishly individual." But while her associations—comedy with the ongoing life of the species and tragedy by contrast with the limited life of the individual, comedy with sex and tragedy with death, comedy with Fortune and tragedy with Fate—do convey the feeling of comedy, they also deny it the challenge that is allowed to tragedy and
lead her to make statements like, "In comedy, therefore, there is a general trivialization of the human battle." This is not so. Comedy is capable of meeting the same challenges tragedy faces, but it does so in its own way. If there is a trivialization, it is in the sense Freud described when he indicated that humor rose above life's obstacles, even death, and chose to regard them as child's play. Thus, one of the most important characteristics of comedy is its affirmativeness, a characteristic not at odds with its rebelliousness. Comedy affirms the self and life in the face of restrictions and even death-dealing forces.

In today's philosophical and literary climate, the climate of an Absurd world, comedy as pure affirmation does rise to meet the challenge. Faced with a structureless situation, the individual has, as Albert Camus has described, three choices: He can deny his inability to know and become an idealist, thus returning to the situation of earlier literature, both tragic and comic. He can deny his desire to know and die, thus choosing nihilism. Or he can maintain the tension between the desire to know and his acknowledgment of his inability and be the Absurd Man, a choice comic in its affirmation of the self and of life.

In the following chapters I hope to give substance to these assertions as to the basic form of comedy and
the nature of the comic response: that comedy's form is a double one consisting of some kind of contrast; that comedy is grounded in play which it resembles in having as its only purpose self-assertion; that comedy is a form of rebellion against inhibition, suppression, repression, oppression, rules; that comedy affirms life even in a meaningless world. In all these cases we should conceive of comedy as symbolic action which elects a strategy of self-assertion, rebellion against restraint, and affirmation of life to encompass any situation a life full of obstacles, sometimes meaningless, and always punctuated by death presents.
CHAPTER 1

COMEDY'S DOUBLENESS

Henri Bergson's basic conception of the laughable, that it consists of "something mechanical encrusted on the living," indicates the double structure of comedy, and the many examples he presents of the comic of forms, movements, situations, words, and character show us the great variety of ways such a basic contrast can manifest itself. I propose that we look now at a number of comic devices and larger units of comedy to see if they do present a double structure and if such doubleness can be described in Bergson's terms. Though we will take up the devices first and then the types of comedy in which such devices may be used, and though within these two categories I will attempt to arrange the comic varieties in an orderly way, such an arrangement is not itself significant. The reader should focus his attention on how these varieties of comedy show a basic doubleness of form. In subsequent chapters we will examine the possible significances such a doubleness may have.

The comic devices we will examine range from the purely physical device of clowning, through varieties of verbal comedy including rhyme, nonsense, dialect, puns,
and wit, to the literary comedy of parody and mock epic. In surveying larger units of comedy we will follow a faintly historical track from folk humor and fabliaux, through farce, the comedy of manners, and satire, to the comedy of humors, mad comedy, and Absurd comedy.

We will find in clowning a contrast between human flexibility and machine-like rigidity; in rhyme a contrast between this mechanistic use of language, with the sound predominating over the sense, and its normal utilitarian function; in nonsense a contrast between another mechanistic use of language, one in which all its grammatical rules are followed but with curious counters, and its serious use; in dialect a contrast between what we consider standard usage and a folksy or idiosyncratic way of speaking; in puns a contrast between words as they are normally used and elaborately contrived "doubles" of them; in wit the long-observed contrast between the usual verbiage required to express an idea and the succinctness with which the witty remark expresses it; in parody the obvious duplication of a style; and in mock epic the incongruous application of a high style to a low subject. In folk humor we will find besides the contrasts created by exaggeration or understatement a contrast between naivete and sophistication. In fabliaux we will find sets of contrasting characters and the basic contrast
they convey, that between inhibition and indulgence. We will find in farce the basic contrast Bergson pointed out between a clockwork arrangement of events and a degree of probability. The comedy of manners offers the contrast provided by the unsociability of its main characters and the contrast between gesture and action that manifests this. Satire, as I have already indicated in the introduction, may differ from comedy in its didacticism, but its form of contrast between society as it is and as it ought to be may well produce a comic reaction. The comedy of humors offers a similar contrast between eccentricity and social conformity, with perhaps more tolerance for the eccentric. In mad comedy the contrast is between the standards of the sane and the reversed standards of the mad; in Absurd comedy the contrast is between a world with some standards and a world without.

Wit, Comedy, and Humor

Before proceeding to the examination of these comic devices and types of comedy for their basic form of doubleness, we would do well to distinguish three frequently used and often confused terms relating to our subject--wit, comedy, and humor. Bergson's distinction between the comic expressed by language, or the comic, and the comic created by language, or the witty, can be taken as a more general distinction. Bergson explains
that "a word is said to be comic when it makes us laugh at the person who utters it, and witty when it makes us laugh either at a third party or at ourselves." This suggests to me that a person we laugh at is a comic character and a person we laugh with is a wit. This means that a punster is a wit and a person who unwittingly falls into a play on words is a comic figure. Richard Sheridan is the wit; Mrs. Malaprop is the comic character. A wit may express his own comedy and thus be a comic character as well. Similarly, a witty author may create a witty character. We may associate, as Bergson does, wit with the comic of words since most comic creation is done verbally, but we should remember that wit includes the creation of physical comedy as well. Still, the most obvious example of wit is the brilliant conversation in Restoration comedies. We should add here Freud's conception of the tendentious quality of wit, its use as a means of expressing hostility, our comic pleasure resulting from the saving of psychical energy usually inhibiting such aggression. Such tendentious wit does require, as Freud notes, three people--wit, victim, and audience. But I wonder if hostility is always the motive behind such tendentious wit. Sometimes it seems that there is something hurtful that must be said and the sayer resorts to wit to soften the blow. It seems this
use of wit would not require a third person. And a third person need not be present in order for such repartee as we find in Mirabell and Millamant's discussion of the marriage contract in Congreve's *Way of the World* to have its comic effect. It seems what we have here is aggression, yes, but not hostile aggression, rather, sexual aggression. Surely each is trying to top the other in a battle of wits, but equally sure is that the primary aim of this wit is not to wound but to attract, as the peacock (and here the peahen as well) does by the spread of his magnificent tail.

Bergson does not make a distinction between comedy and humor. He uses the terms *comedy* and *the comic* throughout his long essay and only mentions *humour* as a method of comedy, in contrast to another method, irony. Irony, he says is oratorical, with the ideal said to be real. Humor is said to be scientific, with the real said to be ideal. We see here again that comedy consists of such contrasts, and we remember that he emphasizes that the comic appeals to the intellect and must not stir the emotions. But we will see that many varieties of comedy do allow appeal to the emotions and that affection can mingle with our laughter. Thus, I think Meredith's distinction between the comic and humor is most suggestive. The comic, he says, is perceptive, addressed
to the intellect; whereas, humor is empathetic, and addresses the feelings. He goes on to say further that "the humorist of mean order is a refreshing laugher, giving tone to the feelings, and sometimes allowing the feelings to be too much for him; but the humorist of high has an embrace of contrasts beyond the scope of the comic poet." Freud is in basic agreement with Meredith here. After concluding that the pleasure in jokes or wit comes from an economy in expenditure upon inhibition, he hypothesizes that the pleasure in the comic comes from an economy in expenditure upon thought and that the pleasure in humor comes from an economy in expenditure upon feeling. In a later essay he again considers "Humour" and reevaluates it upward, showing it to be a way of rising above suffering. On the basis of these suggestions by Bergson, Meredith, and Freud, I would like to define humor as something larger than the comic—the intellectual production of the comic with the dimension of the feelings added. Because comedy is the middle term of the three, the one created by wit and the one to which feelings are added to produce humor, we will use it as our general term. With these distinctions and connections of terms made clear, let us now get down to the examination of comic devices and types of comedy for their basic doubleness.
Comic Devices: Clowning

Pure physical comedy includes both the slip-on-a-banana-peel or custard-pie-in-the-face slapstick of the Three Stooges or Jerry Lewis and the clowning that includes a large portion of mime done by Buster Keaton or Charlie Chaplin. There is a common theory of comedy that argues that we laugh at slapstick because we feel superior to the clumsy oaf who just sat down with a bang or failed in some ludicrous way to win the girl. This theory would seem to necessitate our appreciating the pain and suffering which we are escaping. But do we really consider such pain? If we did, only the true sadist, or perhaps sado-masochist, would enjoy the scene. I find more convincing Bergson's explanation of this type of comedy. After emphasizing the absence of feeling, he explains this kind of comedy as the mechanization of the human body. What we laugh at is the contrast between the flexibility we expect of a living being and the rigidity of a mere puppet. The more skillfully the clown can make these two images coincide, the more he can produce a sense of "contrariety in unity," the more appreciable the comic effect.

There is in the most complex examples of clowning, besides the contrast Bergson points out between human flexibility and machine-like rigidity, a second contrast
which, when melded with this basic one, heightens the comic
effect. This is the contrast provided by a circus clown's
tear-streak make-up or the poignancy of Charlie Chaplin's
disappointed desires. This contrasting sadness is clearly
lacking in much of the slapstick children enjoy as, for
instance, those cartoons where Tom the cat is temporarily
flattened into a coffee table by the anvil intended for
Jerry the mouse. But perhaps it is present in a cartoon
more appreciated by adults, the one where all the
elaborate schemes of the coyote are speedily avoided by
the beep-beeping roadrunner and the coyote is left with
only dashed hopes.

**Comic Devices: Rhyme**

A verbal comic device which amuses both child and
adult is rhyme. The child just learning to speak delights
in the sound repetitions of nursery rhymes. His parent,
reading or reciting these to him, may also be amused by
such an unusual use of language. This amusement is
picked up and carried on by more sophisticated rhyming
works, which are careful to draw attention to their
rhymes. The first canto of Byron's *Don Juan* offers
us many examples of comic rhyme. Byron's rhymes call
attention to themselves by their very contortions. Who
can help snorting at "intellectual/hen-pecked you all"?
Other combinations made up to match single words are quite
exact rhymes--"virtue/hurt you." Best of these single-word/combination-of-words rhymes are the name rhymes--"Pompilious/born bilious." The virtuosity is seen in the simplest, one-syllable rhymes, too, though more rarely, as in "pox/ox." The more outrageous Byron's trickery, the more we appreciate it. We allow, even admire, his bringing in idiomatic expressions ("'at one fell swoop'/a handsome troop") and foreign words ("posse comitatus/as late as/hiatus"). We do not mind his intruding to complete a rhyme--"Silence is best: besides, there is a tact--/(That modern phrase appears to me sad stuff,/But it will serve to keep my verse compact)--." We are even willing to change our pronunciation of some words, botching "Cheops" to make it rhyme with "hopes." Byron's use of ottava rima emphasizes the contortion act of his rhymes by setting a clear pattern and thus building up the reader's anticipation. The stanza's clinching couplet is the favored location for his cleverest rhymes.

The contrast between the normal, graceful use of language and these gawky contraptions is obvious. I submit that in a consonantantal language like English, rhyme is always apt to be funny, and that a serious, lyric poet using rhyme to tighten his form must devote a considerable amount of ingenuity to combating this comic quality by such subtilizing means as enjambment and rhythmic variation.
The heroic couplets so favored in the preceding century offer a test of this hypothesis. Though they heighten satiric wit be it light, as in Pope's *Rape of the Lock*, or heavy, as in his *Dunciad* or Dryden's *MacFlecknoe*, they seem to hinder rather than heighten, as Dryden claims in his prefatory essay, the dramatic effect of such heroic plays as *The Conquest of Granada* and contribute to the play's bombast and fistian rather than trimming and disciplining such disfiguring tendencies. A historically minded scholar may argue that Dryden's play appears funny to us primarily because of a change in convention from the eighteenth century to the twentieth, but this need not alter our conclusion. Such a change in convention itself draws our attention to rhymes that might have been conventionally accepted by contemporary audiences. In passages that are effective even today the rhyme is used subtly, not calling attention to itself. The sexual ecstasy of Almanzor's "Methinks already crown'd with joyes, I lie, / Speechless and breathless in an Exstasie./Not absent in one thought: I am all there:/Still close, yet wishing still to be more near." (2nd, IV, iii) gains tension from the discipline of rhyme, but it should be noted that the near rhyme does not draw attention to itself. Other lines are effective because a comic response to their rhyme is appropriate to their ironic
nature as complaints of love or honor. Included here are Almanzor's witty response to the Spanish Duke of Arcos' "My King his hope from heavens assistance draws:"
"The Moors have Heav'n and me t' assist their cause" (1st, I, i), and Abdelmelech's aptly sarcastic assessment of Lyndaraxa: "I'le sooner trust th' Hyæna than your smile;/Or, than your Tears, the weeping Crocodile" (2nd, II, ii). Dryden expresses his own wit by pointing up characters' self-revelation. This is especially true in the case of the ambitious, fickle Lyndaraxa, surely the most despicable character in the play. In one conversation with one of her adorers, Abdalla, she reveals her basic method—"I know not what my future thoughts, will be:/Poor womens thoughts are all Extempore" (1st, IV, ii). Another candidate for least-favorite character, Boabdilin, reveals both his cowardice and his jealousy in a kind of zeugma: "And now, I think it is an equal strife,/If I my Crown should hazard, or my Wife" (2nd, I, ii).

Our laughter at such complaints or self-revelations is an appropriate response but such is not the case when rhyme draws our attention to certain gaffes. For instance, the singsongy quality of Lyndaraxa's appeal to Almanzor—"Rash Abdelmeleche Love I cannot prize;/And fond Abdalla's passion I despise./As you are brave, so you are prudent too,/Advise a wretched Woman what to do" (2nd, III, iii)—cannot
be assumed to be an intentional display of her opportunist vacillation, as it is addressed to Almanzor, who neither guffaws nor is seduced. Sometimes the rhyme provokes weak repetition as in Benzayda's response to their dilemma presented by Ozymyn: "I'lle fly to you; and you shall fly to me:/Our flight but to each others armes shall be" (1st, V, i). Or a weak rhyme may underline the trite expression of a cliché: "You fairest, to my memory be kind:/Lovers like me your sex will seldom find" (2nd, IV, ii)—this, five lines before the speaker, Abdalla, dies! Poor metaphors are made more obviously so by rhyme—"But as when winds and rain together crow'd,/They swell till they have burst the bladder'd clowd:" (2nd, V, i).

Though Dryden in his preface tackles the argument that "Heroique verse ought [not] to be admitted into serious Playes" because "it is not so near conversation as Prose; and therefore not so natural," his practice belies the theory that the use elevates the work as this conversational exchange illustrates:

Ozymyn. Sent from Benzayda I fear, to me.
      [To them Benzayda in the habit of a man.
Benz. My Ozymyn here!
Ozymyn. ------------Benzaida! 'tis she! (2nd, IV, i)

If, from the proof that The Conquest of Granada offers, you grant that rhyme is apt to be funny in a non-rhyming language like English, why then, you may ask, did Dryden
and his contemporaries not use it in their comedies? Their belief that verse was more elevated than prose, as tragedy, than comedy, is the superficial reason. A more basic reason may be simply the difficulty, seen here, in finding rhymes, especially for conversation. The narrative form provides the author with more freedom of discourse and thus may be successfully rhymed in serious or, as we have seen in *Don Juan*, comic epics. Languages more characterized by vowels such as French or Italian make both dramatic and epic works easier to rhyme effectively. I cannot judge the comic effect of Molière's rhyming couplets, but I suspect Richard Wilbur's brilliant overcoming of the difficulties of translating them into English may have heightened that effect.

**Comic Devices: Nonsense**

The contrast between sound and sense provided by rhyme is often combined with the contrast between sense and the lack of it found in nonsense. A piece of nonsense verse favored by child and parent alike is Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky."

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

That Carroll has followed the grammatical rules of word formation and syntax is clear. In fact, the poem makes an excellent exercise in identifying parts of speech,
as Jean Malmstrom uses it in *An Introduction to Modern English Grammar.* Toves and wabe are clearly nouns; gyre and outgrabe are certainly verbs; brillig and mimsy are definitely adjectives. But what sense does such following of grammatical rules make? No usual one. Such sense as can be made depends on the meaning idiosyncratically bestowed on these unusual counters by Carroll, his characters, and his readers. We find here a contrast between language seriously and conventionally used and this mechanistic and idiosyncratic use.

**Comic Devices: Dialect**

Many a joke-teller has enhanced his tale by the use of dialect. He thus adds its contrast to the contrast that forms the point of the joke and improves his chances of getting a laugh. The assumed dialect may be that of some immigrant group or it may be that of our agricultural ancestors. The comic effect of dialect results, I think, from a comparison of the dialectical passage with our own way of saying the same thing, which we suppose to be the correct way. We may be right in conceiving the comparison this way if the dialect is an immigrant's version of English, but in the case of the dialect of rural folk, their language is actually an older form of English from which our city dialect has derived. (The travel ad, "Come to North Carolina where we speak the Queen's--Elizabeth I's--English!" is surprisingly true.) Some of
these words and expressions—"I reckon we better haul out of here."; "kith and kin"; "branch" (as in, "I'll jist have me a bourbon and branch water."); "You redd up the house 'fore they git here."—are closer to their Middle English roots than their more sophisticated equivalents. Other dialectical words—"corn pone" (American Indian); "goobers" (African); "hoosegow" (Spanish)—are close to the languages from which English has stolen so many riches. Still others recall a life lived closer to the soil; these include the adverbial pair "monstrous" (as, "It got monstrous cold!") and "a mite" (as, "He's a mite better."); adjectives like "pig-headed"; verb phrases like "lend a hand"; and nouns such as "lean-to," "walking stick" (the insect), "hush puppies" (the cornbread kind), and "spider" (for frying pan, originally with legs), and a whole panoply of vivid equivalents for rain storm—"down-pour," "cloudburst," "gully-washer," "goosedrownder," "toad-strangler." Whether we are right or wrong in seeing the dialect as derivative from our own speech, we can appreciate the comic contrast it provides.

**Comic Devices: The Pun**

Another device of verbal comedy often spoken of as "low" by its detractors but greatly appreciated by its perpetrators, perhaps precisely because of the grossness of its departure from the reasonable use of language is the pun. One of my favorite stories concerns an
experiment being conducted by some University of California biologists. They were using dolphins in an attempt to discover ways of lengthening life, perhaps preventing death entirely. Their hypothesis was that this could be brought about by a certain substance present in baby seagulls only at one particular stage of their development. To test this hypothesis they had to capture the just-hatched seagulls, rush them back to the lab, and feed them to the dolphins. They were successful in obtaining the just-hatched birds from a cache of eggs they had discovered on Point Lobos and were rushing back to Berkeley when a lion, escaped from the California State Zoo at San Francisco, blocked the path of their truck. The lion was not dangerous, they discovered, but he proved to be impossible to coax, push, drag, or otherwise remove from the road. With time running out on their experiment, the scientists finally decided to sacrifice the lion by running over him. But they were halted in this regrettable attempt by the appearance of a state trooper. The scientists quickly explained their experiment to the trooper, but he replied implacably, "Don't you know that it's illegal to transport young gulls across a state lion for immortal porpoises?!

What is the basic form of this kind of comedy? Is it another example of contrast? Surely it is--the contrast
between the words of the Mann Act and the elaborately contrived "double" of them. Bergson sees the pun as one of the ways in which language may behave mechanically rather than in a flexible, living way. He calls this type of mechanistic linguistic behavior reciprocal interference and explains that "in the pun, the same sentence appears to offer two independent meanings, but it is only an appearance; in reality there are two different sentences made up of different words, but claiming to be one and the same because both have the same sound." Bergson goes on to discuss what he calls a "true play on words" in which a word or phrase meant in a metaphorical sense is taken literally. Though this may be a better intellectual game, the two are similar enough in form to be taken together here.

**Comic Devices: The Malapropism**

Perhaps a cross between the pun and the Freudian slip is the malapropism. Though anyone could offer examples from his own experience, let us go to the source of the appellation as well as many nice instances, Sheridan's Mrs. Malaprop. Says she, "Sure if I reprehend anything in this world, it is the use of my oracual tongue, and a nice derangement of epitaphs!" (III, iii, 78-80). The double nature of such a self-condemnation and of the malapropisms that accomplish the effect is quite obvious.
Many of Mrs. Malaprop's words are simply the opposites of what she intends—for example, malevolence for benevolence (I, ii, 320)—but in speaking oppositely she may be more ironically apt than she intends—as when she speaks of the ingenuity rather than the ingenuousness of Captain Absolute's appearance (III, iii, 3)—and others of her malapropisms may accidentally produce very effective metaphors—such as her description of Captain Absolute as "the very pine-apple of politeness" (III, iii, 25). Thus, the contrast basic to the malapropism, that between the correct word intended and the incorrect one used, may be funny in itself; it may serve to define its speaker as a comic character; and it may be put to many witty uses by the creator of that character.

Mrs. Malaprop's verbal niceties are limited by her appearance in a play to those that can be appreciated when spoken; whereas, those of her slightly earlier sister (The eighteenth century seems to have abounded in such maladroit users of our language.), Winifred Jenkins, can thank her location in a novel for their occupation of the written range as well. Indeed we may wish to say to her as she to her correspondent, Molly, "And I pray of all love, you will mind your writing and your spilling; for, craving your pardon, Molly, it made me suet to disseyffer your last scrabble, which was delivered by
hind at Bath--O, woman! woman! if thou had'st but the least consumption of what pleasure we scullers have, when we can cunster the crabbidst buck off hand, and spell the ethnitch words without lucking at the primmer" (125). Again the double nature of the malapropisms is obvious and we can look for further kinds of doubleness. She produces portmanteau words like those we have already seen in Lewis Carroll's nonsense; a good example is an emotional upset described as a *fulation* (124). Like Mrs. Malaprop, Win Jenkins often produces apt metaphors accidentally; examples include her transmogrification of *infidel* into *impfiddle* (358) and her name for a gentleman's man--"valley de shambles" (359). Sometimes Win's style gives her words unintended satirical import, such satire being directed against religion in general and marriage in particular. She says, "Mr. Clinker assures me, that by the new light of grease, I may deify the devil and all his works" (359). And she protests that her "parents were marred according to the rights of holy mother crutch, in the face of men and angles" (396). Sometimes, alas, Win's innocence leads her into mistakes that we may see as obscene. She hints, "O, if I was given to tail-baring, I have my own secrets to discover" (256). We can see again in Win Jenkins' case that the basic contrast within the malapropism can be put to witty, satirical, and obscene use by the creator of the comic character who utters it.
Comic Devices: Wit

Wit with its doubled form, repartee, is a comic device that appears in many larger units of comedy. In an endeavor to discover its basic form let us look to what Shakespeare's Polonius ironically points out is its "soul"—brevity. A witty remark may make use of such devices as the pun, irony, paradox, or incongruity, all of which have a double nature, but the basic contrast in the nature of wit, which these devices all help to produce, is that between the usual amount of verbiage needed to convey an idea and the succinctness with which the witty remark conveys it. In repartee, which can be defined as a kind of fencing with wit, we have wit redoubled, with two people or characters engaging in a battle of wits.

Comic Devices: Parody

Parody is clearly double in that it consists of the duplication of the style of a particular literary work. A good example of parody can be found in The Catcher in the Rye right after Holden's ridiculous run-in with the prostitute Sunny and her pimp, Maurice.

But I'm crazy. I swear to God I am. About halfway to the bathroom, I sort of started pretending I had a bullet in my guts. Old Maurice had plugged me. Now I was on the way to the bathroom to get a good shot of bourbon or something to steady my nerves and help me really go into action. I pictured myself coming out of the goddam bathroom, dressed and all, with my automatic in my pocket, and staggering around a little bit. Then I'd walk downstairs,
instead of using the elevator. I'd hold onto the banister and all, with this blood trickling out of the side of my mouth a little at a time. What I'd do, I'd walk down a few floors—holding onto my guts, blood leaking all over the place—and then I'd ring the elevator bell. As soon as old Maurice opened the doors, he'd start screaming at me, in this very high-pitched, yellow-belly voice, to leave him alone. But I'd plug him anyway. Six shots right through his fat hairy belly. Then I'd throw my automatic down the elevator shaft—after I'd wiped off all the finger prints and all. Then I'd crawl back to my room and call up Jane and have her come over and bandage up my guts. I pictured her holding a cigarette for me to smoke while I was bleeding and all.

The goddam movies. They can ruin you. I'm not kidding.18

The fun of this parody lies in the duplication in Holden's daydream of Bogie's typical mannerisms, a duplication which Bergson says implies mechanization. But the daydream shares more than that with the Bogart films it parodies; it shares the underlying feeling which this tough-guy act almost hides. In the paragraph immediately following Holden admits, "What I really felt like, though, was committing suicide."

That parody can produce works with either contrasting or similar standards of values is evidenced by one chain of parodies that goes from Samuel Richardson and Cervantes to John Barth. Henry Fielding, objecting to the puritanism that he thought only disguised the prurience of Richardson's Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded, satirically parodied it in his Shamela, the complete title of which is

An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews, in which the many notorious Falsehoods and
Misrepresentations of a Book called Pamela, Are exposed and refuted; and all the matchless Arts of that young Politician, set in a true and just Light. Together with a full Account of all that passed between her and Parson Arthur Williams; whose Character is represented in a manner something different from what he bears in Pamela. The whole being exact copies of authentic Papers delivered to the Editor. Necessary to be had in all Families. By Mr. Conny Keyber.

That such a parody deriding the values underlying one work can lead on to the production of a positive alternative based on contrasting values can be seen in Fielding's Joseph Andrews, which begins as another burlesque of Pamela and goes on to imitate Don Quixote, more appreciatively, the complete title being The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews, And of his friend Mr. Abraham Adams. Written in Imitation of The Manner of Cervantes, Author of Don Quixote. And further suggestive of the idea that such imitation may be productive of work of genuine worth of its own is the fact that from Joseph Andrews came The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling. Probably not finally, there is John Barth's parody of this type of eighteenth-century novel, The Sot-Weed Factor.

Comic Devices: Mock Epic

Like parody the mock epic shows an obvious doubleness of form, and also like parody it may glorify the values of its subject as well as ridicule them, sometimes achieving both effects at once. The classic example of the mock epic,
Alexander Pope's *Rape of the Lock*, manages this feat. Its portrayal of the game of ombre as a battle royal accomplishes the satirical purpose of showing the rape of the lock in its true, tiny stature, while at the same time its apotheosis of the lock provides the flattery necessary to achieve reconciliation between the two estranged families.

Similarly James Joyce's *Ulysses* uses epic style to create a comic portrait of Leopold Bloom while at the same time the humorous handling of Bloom does add a measure of epic feeling to our response to him. But Joyce's use of epic conventions enables even one on whom the book's subtleties are lost to enjoy the book comically. One of the funniest such passages is this epic catalogue:

From his girdle hung a row of seastones which dangled at every movement of his portentous frame and on these were graven with rude yet striking art the tribal images of many Irish heroes and heroines of antiquity, Cuchulín, Conn of hundred battles, Niall of nine hostages, Brian of Kincora, the Ardri Malachi, Art MacMurragh, Shane O'Neill, Father John Murphy, Owen Roe, Patrick Sarsfield, Red Hugh O'Donnell, Red Jim MacDermott, Soggarth Boghan O'Growney, Michael Dwyer, Francy Higgins, Henry Joy M'Cracken, Goliath, Horace Wheatley, Thomas Conneff, Peg Woffington, the Village Blacksmith, Captain Moonlight, Captain Boycott, Dante Alighieri, Christopher Columbus, S. Fursa, S. Brendan, Marshal MacMahon, Charlemagne, Theobald Wolfe Tone, the Mother of the Maccabees, the Last of the Mohicans, the Rose of Castille, the Man for Galway, The Man that Broke the Bank...
at Monte Carlo, The Man in the Gap, The Woman Who Didn't, Benjamin Franklin, Napoleon Bonaparte, John L. Sullivan, Cleopatra, Savourneen Dealish, Julius Caesar, Paracelsus, sir Thomas Lipton, William Tell, Michelangelo, Hayes, Muhammad, the Bride of Lammermoor, Peter the Hermit, Peter the Packer, Dark Rosaleen, Patrick W. Shakespeare, Brian Confucius, Murtagh Gutenberg, Patricio Velasquez, Captain Nemo, Tristan and Isolde, the first Prince of Wales, Thomas Cook and Son, the Bold Soldier Boy, Arrah na Pogue, Dick Turpin, Ludwig Beethoven, the Colleen Dawn, Waddler Healy, Angus the Culdee, Dolly Mount, Sidney Parade, Ben Howth, Valentine Greatrakes, Adam and Eve, Arthur Wellesley, Boss Croker, Herodotus, Jack the Giantkiller, Gautama Buddha, Lady Godiva, The Lily of Killarney, Balor of the Evil Eye, the Queen of Sheba, Acky Nagle, Alessandro Volta, Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa, Don Philip O'Sullivan Beare.19

The incongruity of many of the inclusions in this catalogue of Irish heroes and heroines must produce an effect comparable to Bergson's mechanicalism.

All these comic devices—clowning, rhyme, nonsense, dialect, puns, malapropisms, wit, parody, and mock epic—are used to help produce the comic effect of larger units of comedy. Indeed some devices come near to characterizing certain of these larger units. Clowning is closely associated with farce. Molière's comedies are written in rhyming couplets. Dialect is nearly inseparable from folk humor. We have found malapropisms to be an important device in a play and a novel. Wit is the most distinguishing characteristic of the comedy of manners. Parody and mock epic are often used to give satire its
surface glitter. Let us now look at these types of comedy to see if they also show doubleness as the structure of the whole.

**Types of Comedy: Folk Humor**

Typical of folk humor is the tall tale. These range downward from such legendary stories as how Paul Bunyan dug the Grand Canyon by dragging his pick or how Pecos Bill performed an easier feat, digging the Rio Grande, but in a more difficult way, by riding a cyclone, or how John Henry, the steel-drivin' man, won a contest with a steam drill, to ordinary fish stories such as the following, well, perhaps extraordinary one from Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*: "Well, the days went along, and the river went down between its banks again; and about the first thing we done was to bait one of the big hooks with a skinned rabbit and set it and catch a cat-fish that was as big as a man, being six foot two inches long, and weighed over two hundred pounds. We couldn't handle him, of course; he would a flung us into Illinois. We just set there and watched him rip and tear around till he d Rownded."²⁰ These stories obviously employ the technique of exaggeration, but the opposite technique, understatement, is also typical of folk humor. "The reports of my death," Mark Twain commented, "are greatly exaggerated."²¹ In this passage from William Faulkner's
As I Lay Dying, Cash Bundren's stoicism echoes the cowboy's understatement of pain, "It only hurts when I laugh," while Dr. Peabody's sarcasm supplies the flat or exaggerated contrast:

I said, "I reckon a man in a tight might let Bill Varner patch him up like a damn mule, but I be damned if the man that'd let Anse Bundren treat him with raw cement aint got more spare legs than I have."

"They just aimed to ease hit some," he said.

"Aimed, hell," I said. "What in hell did Armstid mean by even letting them put you on that wagon again?"

"Hit was gittin right noticeable," he said. "We never had time to wait." I just looked at him. "Hit never bothered me none," he said.

"Dont you lie there and try to tell me you rode six days on a wagon without springs, with a broken leg and it never bothered you."

"It never bothered me much," he said.

"You mean, it never bothered Anse much," I said. "No more than it bothered him to throw that poor devil down in the public street and handcuff him like a damn murderer. Dont tell me. And dont tell me it aint going to bother you to lose sixty-odd square inches of skin to get that concrete off. And dont tell me it aint going to bother you to have to limp around on one short leg for the balance of your life—if you walk at all again. Concrete," I said. "God Almighty, why didn't Anse carry you to the nearest sawmill and stick your leg in the saw? That would have cured it. Then you all could have stuck his head into the saw and cured a whole family."

But the contrasts provided by exaggeration and understatement are not the only kinds of contrast we find in folk humor. Another kind is the contrast between the folk characters' naiveté and the audience's greater sophistication. There is this example from
Huck Finn:

'Well, I don't know. Some of them gets on the police, and some of them learns people how to talk French.'

'Why, Huck, doan' de French people talk de same way we does?'

'No, Jim; you couldn't understand a word they said--not a single word.'

'Well, now, I be ding-busted! How do dat come?'

'I don't know; but it's so. I got some of their jabber out of a book. S'pose a man was to come to you and say Polly-voo-franzy--what would you think?'

'I wouldn' think nuff'n; I'd take en bust him over de head. Dat is, if he warn't white. I wouldn' low no nigger to call me dat.'

'Shucks, it ain't calling you anything. It's only saying do you know how to talk French.'

'Well, den, why couldn't he say it?'

'Why, he is a-saying it. That's a Frenchman's way of saying it.'

'Well, it's a blame' ridicklous way, en I doan' want to hear no mo' 'bout it. Dey ain' no sense in it.'

'Looky here, Jim; does a cat talk like we do?'

'No, a cat don't.'

'Well, does a cow?'

'No, a cow don't, nuther.'

'Does a cat talk like a cow, or a cow talk like a cat?'

'No, dey don't.

'It's natural and right for 'em to talk different from each other, ain't it?'

'Course.'

'And ain' it natural and right for a cat and a cow to talk different from us?'

'Why, mos' sholy it is.'

'Well, then, why ain't it natural and right for a Frenchman to talk different from us? You answer me that.'

'Is a cat a man, Huck?'

'No.'

'Well, den, dey ain't no sense in a cat talkin' like a man. Is a cow a man?--er is a cow a cat?'

'No, she ain't either of them.'
'Well, den, she ain't got no business to talk like either one er the yuther of 'em. Is a Frenchman a man?'

'Yes.'

'Well, den! Dad blame it, why doan' he talk like a man? You answer me dat!'

I see it warn't no use wasting words--you can't learn a nigger to argue. So I quit.23

Here Jim plays the ignorant bumpkin to Huck's sophisticate while Huck plays the bumpkin to our greater sophistication. But we should be careful here. Perhaps, as in the case of dialect, the contrast really works the other way around. Jim's demolition of Huck's argument from analogy may also undermine our sense of our own sophistication.

**Types of Comedy: The Fabliau**

Related to folk humor at least in their shared earthy quality is the medieval *fabliau*. Such risqué, or more often obscene, stories, however basic their appeal, show a degree of sophistication indicating that much loving attention had been lavished on their development and polishing. A choice example is Chaucer's "Miller's Tale." Here the goal toward which the story moves is "hende" Nicholas' "swyvyng" of Alisoun of the "lierous ye." The main obstacle in the way of the achievement of this goal and the representative of marital inhibition is the older and dumber John, Alisoun's husband. That inhibition is lifted into a tub hung from the attic rafters in anticipation, prompted by Nicholas, of the second coming of "Nowellis flood" and eventually
it, or he, is dashed down into the cellar. Not content with this one representative of inhibition the story provides another in the form of the courtly lover Absolon. His sweetening his breath with an herb makes his dismissal and that of the inhibition against obscenity by Alisoun in the misdirected kiss all the more hilarious. Punishment falls on Nicholas in what may be seen as a release of the inhibition against hostility, his being "scalded in the towte," and finally the original inhibition of marriage is restored.

The doubleness in such dirty stories is clearly explained by Freud. Our pleasure comes from the saving of energy normally expended on inhibiting such obscenity. Our pleasure may have a more primary component—a vicarious enjoyment of the sex portrayed—but perhaps some damming up of pleasure by way of an inhibition may be necessary to create a burst of comic enjoyment. Thus, the double nature of the fabliau itself with its contrasting representatives of inhibition and indulgence produces a psychological reaction which is also double—recognition of the inhibition and temporary relief from it.

**Types of Comedy: Farce**

The action of the fabliau might itself be described as farce, and indeed farcical action is frequently combined with a sexual subject. To the case of farce
or the comic of situation Bergson's theory of "something mechanical encrusted on the living" applies quite nicely. He describes the basic form of a farce as "an obvious clockwork arrangement of human events" combined with "an outward aspect of probability" which reminds us of "the suppleness of life." I must confess that in such films as The Pink Panther with Peter Sellers or such plays as George Feydeau's A Flea in Her Ear I am always vaguely concerned that this delicate balance will fail to be maintained and the production will slip over into mere improbable silliness or fall back into all-too-predictable dullness. For an example that produces a feeling of security within the form then, let us turn to the master. Shakespeare's Comedy of Errors is, like the Menaechmi of Plautus from which it is derived, clearly a farce, but the changes Shakespeare made show how he heightened both sides of the inherent contrast and made his play a consummate farce. The main change heightening the "clockwork arrangement" is, of course, that Shakespeare has not one set of identical twins, the Antipholuses, but a second set, the Dromios. This doubling of twins also doubles the number of confused encounters they may be involved in. Another less obvious but equally important change is the setting. Ephesus, with its biblical reputation as a place of sorcery is an apt location for the dream-like confusion
that a farce entails. Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse are certainly familiar with this reputation; early in the play Antipholus says,

They say this town is full of cozenage, As, nimble jugglers that deceive the eye, Dark-working sorcerers that change the mind, Soul-killing witches that deform the body, Disguised cheaters, prating mountebanks, And many such-like liberties of sin. (I, ii, 97-102)

And very near the end of the play Duke Solinus seems to confirm this from the Ephesian point of view, saying, "I think you all have drunk of Circe's cup" (V, i, 270).

The other additions Shakespeare makes to the cast heighten the other side of the contrast, the "outward probability." The addition of the parents of the two Antipholuses, Aegaeon and Aemilia, creates a kind of tragic relief for the comedy, both in their romance conveying the tragedy of separation and in Aegaeon's confrontation with the laws of Ephesus in the person of the Duke, also added, contributing the danger of execution. The substitution of Luciana, the sister, for Senex, the father of Adriana makes possible another kind of relief in her romance with Antipholus of Syracuse and in the realistic presentation of the troubles of an established marriage seen in her discussions with Adriana. Both of these presentations of marriage, the romantic and the realistic, would have been impossible for Plautus with his notorious disregard for women. Balancing the contribution that
setting the play in Ephesus contributes to the improbable workings of the farce are the fairly realistic theories that the Antipholuses come up with to explain the strange ways in which they are treated. Antipholus of Syracuse concludes that indeed the town is crazy, while Antipholus of Ephesus is driven to such paranoia concerning his wife's faithfulness and his own credit as a merchant that he in part justifies the Ephesians' conclusion that he is mad. There are finally stylistic elements that also heighten the two sides of the contrast that makes up farce. The abundance of couplets complements nicely the twinning and the encounters. On the realistic side the motifs of time and money running throughout the play (There are at least a hundred references to each in this, Shakespeare's shortest play.) contribute at least the appearance of location in the normal world.

Molière's comedy of manners mediates between farce and satire. I would like to bracket my discussion of it with discussions of representatives of these two extremes. The farce, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, is atypical of its class. True, there is the farcical contrast consisting of an absurd situation with an air of possibility, but the comedy is not physical but verbal. The situation is both complicated and resolved by the mental fixations of the characters. These consist first
of the mental creations of Jack Worthing's brother "Ernest" and Algernon Moncrieff's invalid friend "Bunbury," next of the common desire of both Gwendolen Fairfax and Cecily Cardew to marry a man named Ernest, and finally of Lady Bracknell's thwarting, then enabling determination that Gwendolen shall marry someone acceptable to her. The fact that Gwendolen and Cecily record the sensational affairs of their lives, as they occur or as they will occur, in their diaries is reflected in the mental fixations of minor characters like the Reverend Chasuble, who uses his sermon on the meaning of the manna in the wilderness for all occasions, and the novelist Miss Prism, whose mislaid three-volume creation presumably followed her formula: "The good end happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means." 26

What causes me to use this play to introduce Molière is that the characters in it like many of Molière's are totally selfish and yield not a bit to social demands. This is indicated in the following lines of dialogue:

Jack. "I don't propose to discuss modern culture. It isn't the sort of thing one should talk of in private" (47).
Algernon. "I hate people who are not serious about meals. It is so shallow of them" (48). Gwendolen. "The old-fashioned respect for the young is fast dying out" (53).
Cecily. "I don't quite like women who are interested in
philanthropic work. I think it so forward of them" (61). Lady Bracknell. "I was not aware that Mr Bunbury was interested in social legislation. If so, he is well punished for his morbidity" (67). Such lines, indeed almost any line in the play, indicate how the details of expression carry out the farcical contrast of the whole. The arch, fey dialogue flies in the face of social conception, even of logic.

Types of Comedy: The Comedy of Manners

Molière's comedy of manners incorporates such farce into a larger social scheme. Meredith's conception of comedy, that it appeals to the individual mind to perceive and participate in the social, certainly helps us to discern the nature of the comic contrasts in Molière's comedies. In The Misanthrope it is the contrast between Alceste and the society which both repels and lures him. Many critics see this play as more problematic than it is because they underestimate Célimène, a mistake Meredith, with his appreciation for the role of women in both civilization and comedy, does not make. She is not just Alceste's opposite, a representative of the hypocrisy and vanity of the society he is resisting. She appeals to Alceste not just by her sexual attractiveness but by her perception of the same hypocrisy and vanity Alceste is protesting. And it should be noted, in support of this
view, that Alceste, in his protest, appeals to her. Thus, she, like Philinte, represents the intelligent compromise which Alceste finally rejects. Bergson's view of Alceste is complementary. He sees the two forces at work in Alceste, the one the truthful "misanthropist" and the other the polite gentleman, as both rigidified, producing a mechanical action in this human being.\textsuperscript{28} The fact that Molière himself played Alceste as a clown supports this view as his intention.\textsuperscript{29}

How does Meredith's theory of the comicality of unsociability fit Tartuffe? Here the situation is more complex with two deviants from the social order who contrast with each other. Tartuffe's religious hypocrisy contrasts with Orgon's credulousness. Meredith's theory focuses on Orgon. As Bergson rightly points out, laughable faults must be merely unsociable, not immoral,\textsuperscript{30} and Tartuffe's religious hypocrisy oversteps this bound, making it necessary for this vice to be carried off with his person. Orgon's fault of single-minded gullibility can, however, be redeemed. Bergson also discusses the comic rigidity of Orgon and Tartuffe. The farcical scene in which Orgon hides under the table while Tartuffe seduces his wife is but one display of Orgon's rigidity. As for Tartuffe's, Bergson comments, "Did we merely take his actions into account, Tartuffe would belong to drama:
it is only when we take his gestures into consideration that we find him comic.\textsuperscript{31} A production in which Tartuffe almost danced his villainy\textsuperscript{32} seemed to me to prove Bergson's point and also to avoid the pitfall on the other side of the line the actor playing Tartuffe must walk, the one pitfall of being too complete a villain and thus turning the comedy into a drama and the other of being too realistic a trickster and thus a victim of excessive punishment at the end.

Types of Comedy: Satire

On the other extreme of Molière's comedy of manners lies satire, as is indicated by the themes of righteous misanthropy and of the dangers of religious hypocrisy, the reverse side of the theme of unsociability we have noted in \textit{The Misanthrope} and \textit{Tartuffe}. A kind of comedy conceived by its author to be satirical but so gentle with its characters as to be almost romantic is the comedy of George Bernard Shaw. Let us take for example \textit{Arms and the Man}. If the title does not tell us that this play is about the false romanticism of war, the initial set description, with its enumeration of good Bulgarian and cheap Viennese things, makes it clear that a false romanticism of taste is being criticized. But though Raina Petkoff and Sergius Saranoff must learn that their romantic conception of war is false, they are
allowed a romanticism in love that enables them to marry across class boundaries—not each other but Raina to Bluntschli, the wealthy free citizen with a peasant's ideas, and Sergius to Louka, the maid with an aristocratic demeanor. Much of the surface wit is based upon this contrast between real individuals and false society.

Genuine satire generally attacks false or evil social norms by ridiculing characters embodying them. Sinclair Lewis satirizes anti-intellectual commercialism in the person of George Babbitt, as is seen in this excerpt from the speech he gives to the Boosters' Club:

"'I believe, however, in keeping the best to the last. When I remind you that we have one motor car for every five and seven-eighths persons in the city, then I give a rock-ribbed practical indication of the kind of progress and braininess which is synonymous with the name of Zenith!

"'But the way of the righteous is not all roses. Before I close I must call your attention to a problem we have to face, this coming year. The worst menace to sound government is not the avowed socialists but a lot of cowards who work under cover—the long-haired gentry who call themselves "liberals" and "radicals" and "non-partisan" and "intelligentsia" and God only knows how many other trick names! Irresponsible teachers and professors constitute the worst of this whole gang, and I am ashamed to say that several of them are on the faculty of our great State University! The U. is my own Alma Mater, and I am proud to be known as an alumni, but there are certain instructors there who seem to think we ought to turn the conduct of the nation over to hoboés and roustabouts.

"'Those profs are the snakes to be scotched—they and all their milk-and-water
ilk! The American business man is generous to a fault, but one thing he does demand of all teachers and lecturers and journalists: if we're going to pay them our good money, they've got to help us by selling efficiency and whooping it up for rational prosperity! And when it comes to these blab-mouth, fault-finding, pessimistic, cynical University teachers, let me tell you that during this golden coming year it's just as much our duty to bring influence to have those cusses fired as it is to sell all the real estate and gather in all the good shekels we can.

"'Not till that is done will our sons and daughters see that the ideal of American manhood and culture isn't a lot of cranks sitting around chewing the rag about their Rights and their Wrongs, but a God-fearing, hustling, successful, two-fisted Regular Guy, who belongs to some church with pep and piety to it, who belongs to the Boosters or the Rotarians or the Kiwanis, to the Elks or Moose or Red Men or Knights of Columbus or any one of a score of organizations of good, jolly, kidding, laughing, sweating, upstanding, lend-a-handing Royal Good Fellows, who plays hard and works hard, and whose answer to his critics is a square-toed boot that'll teach the grouchies and smart alecks to respect the He-man and get out and root for Uncle Samuel, U. S. A.!'"33

Though the gap between Babbitt's ideas herein expressed and those ideals Lewis thought ought to govern society may be large and easily appreciated by those who share Lewis' values, the gap between this speech and the speeches it parodies is so small as to be imperceptible to the targets of the satire, as was illustrated when this speech, only slightly changed in time and locale references, was delivered to the Rotarians (or Lions or Kiwanis) in Duluth (or Detroit or Des Moines) and greeted with great enthusiasm and not the slightest evidence of suspicion.34
Types of Comedy: The Comedy of Humors

Satire deals harshly with individuals it portrays as representative of a false social norm. The comedies of Molière deal rather less harshly with deviators from an acceptable social norm. Tartuffe must be expelled, but Alceste isolates himself, and Orgon is welcomed back into the fold. The comedy that grew out of this comedy of manners displays even more tolerance toward eccentric characters. But before looking at this comedy ofhumors, I would like to examine a similar form of comedy familiar to all of us. I will call it the humor of adolescence. No one could better combine concern with social conformity and deviating behavior than an adolescent. A good example of such a contrast is found in this episode from William Goldman's novel The Temple of Gold. Ray Trevitt is about to call a girl to ask for his first date. Not knowing how to bring this off, he is armed with a script prepared for him by his best friend, Zock, and Zock's girl, Bunny. This is what happens:

"Sure thing," I said, and I dialed the number. When the receiver got picked up, I put my finger under the first speech and started reading. "Hello," I said. "Is this Sally Farmer?"

"No," came the answer. "This here is Ingebord."


"I'll see," was the reply.
"What if she's not there," I said to Zock. "For c'rikes . . ."

"Hello," came a voice on the other end. I grabbed up the papers. "Hello," I said, reading away. "Is this Sally Farmer?"

"Yes. Who is this?"

"Well," I read. "This is Ray Trevitt."

"Who?" she asked me.

I panicked. "Zock," I whispered. "She says 'who?' What do I say?"

"Tell her who you are," he whispered back. "Well," I said again. "This is Ray Trevitt."

"I don't know any Ray Trevitt," she said.

"You must have the wrong number."

"Cut the crap, Sally Farmer," I yelled into the phone. Zock smacked his forehead and fell on the floor.

"What did you say?" she asked.

"This here is Ray Trevitt," I answered, trying to get calm. "You know. Ray Trevitt."

"Oh, yes," she said, sounding very haughty.

"Perhaps I remember."

"You must have the mind of a minnow," I told her. "Seeing as I sat behind you all last year in geometry."

"Oh," she said. "That Ray Trevitt."

"The same," I said, starting to read again.

"I heard you were back from camp and I thought I'd just ring up to say hello."

"How did you know I was at camp?"

"You have a good time at camp this year? I under--"

"That's really none of your business," she told me.

I went right on reading, mainly because I couldn't think of anything else to do. "I understand you were a junior counselor. Gee. That sounds like a lot of fun."

"What in the world are you talking about?"

"I'm talking," I screamed into the phone, "about your seven lousy four-year-olds. I mean your four lousy seven-year-olds. Sally Farmer," I said, throwing the papers away, "do you know what you can do? You can take--"

"If you called to ask me out," she interrupted. "The answer is no."

"Ho, ho, ho," I said. "Who would want to ask you out anyway? Not me. Not under any conditions."

"In that case," she said, "I accept." Then she hung up.

And so it was arranged.
Bergson could readily spot the mechanical quality here, but I am sure our laughter is not purely intellectual appreciation of this contrast, but contains a humorous identification of feeling. Thus, besides the contrast between social norm and the adolescent's deviating behavior, an essentially comic contrast, we have in the audience's response to this episode yet another contrast, that between the detachment that enables us to laugh at Ray and the involvement that makes us laugh with him.

Though a teenager may not have attained the detachment from such a situation that age brings, he himself can appreciate this same kind of comedy when it is transposed to childhood as it is in the almost universally popular Peanuts cartoon strip. Here we have children's problems—Charlie Brown's no-win baseball record, Lucy Van Pelt's conflict between the desire to run everything and everybody and the desire to be popular, Sally Brown's difficulties with her schoolwork, Linus Van Pelt's problems holding on to his security blanket, and Snoopy's frustrated ambition to get the Red Baron—which are also readily recognized as adolescent or adult problems. The combination of involvement and detachment here is best explained by the metaphor Freud uses to explain humor. He depicts its working in terms of a parental super-ego comforting the ego by indicating that such problems are child's play.36
Our mixed response to this humor of adolescence or of childhood provides a good introduction to the response aroused in us by the comedy of humors. Somehow Laurence Sterne managed to recombine the comedy of humors which had contributed to the comedy of manners with the comedy of sentiment into which the comedy of manners had changed in the eighteenth century. The society that produced Laurence Sterne and subsequently his novel *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* appears to have been so secure that it could deal with those eccentrics who did not fit the mold, not by scorning them as out-of-fashion as did Restoration comedy nor even by regarding them as a threat to sociability as Molière's comedy did, but by tolerating them, even indulging them.

Before discussing this novel, perhaps it would be well to trace the theory of humors out of which the comedy of humors arose. The theory of humors was, of course, the basic medical theory of the Middle Ages. According to it, sickness was due to an imbalance of the four body fluids or "humors"—blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. Having run its medical course, the theory was taken up by incipient psychology and by it four types of temperament were distinguished, the sanguine, the phlegmatic, the choleric, and the melancholy. One can
easily see at this point the connection of the word humor with feelings. The theory was taken up and further broadened by dramatists whose humorous characters each displayed one dominant trait. Some to be found in Ben Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour* are violence, bragging, trickiness, jealousy, irritability, and melancholy. Gradually the term humorist was further broadened to apply to any kind of eccentric. Sterne took up the theory at this point as one can see in his character Uncle Toby whose ruling passion or "hobby-horse" is to reconstruct the campaigns of Marlborough in miniature on his small bowling green. As I have said, Sterne managed to combine this comedy of humors and the sentimental novel.37 Besides giving us comic characters with whom we can also empathize, he provides us with finely drawn sentiment, such as the story of the death of Le Fever, and also with burlesque of sentimentalism, as can be seen in the story of Uncle Toby's sparing a fly. The contrast is easy to see here—the contrast between comedy and humor, intellectual wit and empathetic whim, a contrast which is really a combination, a combination they (including Bergson) said could not be made, in which both sides are fully appreciated.

But the main humorist in *Tristram Shandy* is the novelist himself. This humorist is the novelist in the
book, supposedly Tristram, though he is only conceived and not born through the first two of the nine volumes that make up the whole, and also the novelist writing the book, the more than implied author (Sterne has patterned another character, Parson Yorick, on himself, but he is killed off in Volume I.), as these two are brought together into one. That this novelist's hobby-horse is whim and impulse is evident in the structure of the book which has been described as "progressive digression."\(^{38}\) The novelist describes his story line in this way:

In the fifth volume I have been very good;--the precise line I have described in it being this:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{A} & \text{B} & c & c & c & c & c & D \\
\end{array}
\]

By which it appears, that except at the curve marked A, where I took a trip to Navarre,--and the indented curve B, which is the short airing when I was there with the Lady Baussiere and her page,--I have not taken the least frisk of a digression, till John de la Casse's devils led me the round you see marked D--for as for \(c & c & c & c,\) they are nothing but parentheses, and the common ins and outs incident to the lives of the greatest ministers of state; and when compared with what men have done,--or with my own transgressions at the letters A B D--they vanish into nothing.\(^{39}\)

This device, besides being the result of the humorist's hobby-horse, is also funny in itself as are the novelist's various other structural and mechanical
tricks including placing the dedication in the eighth chapter of the first volume; putting the preface in Volume III, Chapter 10; postponing the writing of Chapters 18 and 19 of Volume IX (because his Uncle Toby is whistling and he cannot concentrate) until after Chapter 25, where the reader finds them, conspicuously labeled The Eighteenth Chapter and Chapter the Nineteenth; giving the reader a chapter to write (a description of the widow Wadman, Volume VI, Chapter 38); tearing out a chapter (In my edition pages 245 to 254 are missing.) because it was so beautifully done that, left in, it would spoil the rest of the book by comparison; including an entirely black page ["Alas, poor YORICK!"] and a marbled one ["(motley emblem of my work!)"]; and using a number of ☼'s and bucketfuls of * * * * * * * * * *.

Much of the comic effect of Tristram Shandy is based on this difference between what is (this partnership between the novelist and the reader) and what should be, or rather is expected (the active-novelist and passive-reader roles). And this comedy of humors as well as that of the characters described is heightened by the contrasting or combining sentimentalism. Bergson's mechanization theory of comedy certainly applies here. But so does Freud's idea of an economy of expenditure upon inhibition of pleasure in obscenity (here almost entirely sexual), as a large part of the content of the
book consists of double entendre, the most memorable to me being the story concerning "noses" supposedly translated from Hafen Slawkenbergius de Nasis.

Types of Comedy: Mad Comedy

It seems no great step to go from the zaniness of the humorists both in and of Tristram Shandy to comedy dealing with the mad. Here the basic contrast is that between the sane and the insane. There was a time when Londoners went to view the inmates of Bedlam for amusement, presumably taking it in much the same way a zoo visitor takes amusement from the almost human but ludicrously "mechanical" antics of the monkeys. Perhaps, too, it is the mechanical quality of the scene that makes us laugh at the tilting with windmills by the tall, angular Don Quixote while his short, rotund sidekick, Sancho Panza, stands by urging him to see that they are not giants. But, of course, as the book progresses, this contrast between the madness resulting from reading too many romantic adventures and the practical nature of the real world develops into a more significant contrast between an idealism and a sordid reality and our feeling for Don Quixote grows as does Sancho Panza's. Our desire for a better world and disgust with the present one has led to modern films and novels where normal standards of sanity and madness
are questioned and sometimes the terms are inversely applied. In the film **King of Hearts**, the hero, played by Alan Bates, chooses to join the harmlessly playing inmates of an asylum rather than return to his company which is involved in World-War-I fighting. The question as to which is the mad world and which the sane is central to the humor of Ken Kesey's **One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest**. We quickly figure out that Red McMurphy and the other men in the psychiatric ward are a lot saner than Big Nurse and the rest of the staff, and we delight in their quite normal antics—the TV rebellion, the fishing trip, the party in the dorm complete with loose women and vodka-port-wine-and-cough-syrup punch. But when the shock treatments begin and finally when McMurphy is lobotomized, we see that the "real world" is seriously insane and that the sane are in deadly danger. Thus, an initially comic contrast turns into a grim one.

**Types of Comedy: Absurd Comedy**

Here our common judgments are reversed, but in Absurd or black comedy such as Joseph Heller's **Catch-22** these standards are snatched from us and we are left without a sure basis for determining whether to view an action as comic, tragic, both, or neither. It might appear at first that Yossarian's paranoid pacifism provides us with a standard as, according to **Catch-22**,
"Anyone who wants to get out of combat duty isn't really crazy."40 But, of course, it is this catch that keeps Yossarian on the same circular treadmill. The entire book is characterized by this kind of circularity. Occurrences—the soldier in white, the whore who beat Orr over the head with her shoe, Snowden's death—sketched at the beginning are referred to throughout and appear in their full version at the end. There has been some illumination—of a garish sort—but no progression. Most of the conversations in the book—for instance, Milo's explanation as to how he makes a profit buying eggs for seven cents apiece and selling them for five cents (236–237), or the colonel and major's accusation that Chaplain Tappman's own handwriting is a forgery (389–391)—show this same circularity. In this kind of a world the line between good guys and bad guys is not easily drawn. Yossarian is not merely up against Germans and Italians; nor is the enemy limited to the bureaucratic army with its conflict between General Dreedle and General Peckem and paradoxical relationship between Colonel Cathcart and Colonel Korn; the enemy includes sadistic fellow soldiers like Havermeyer and soldiers who rise from the ranks as Scheisskopf does from lieutenant to general; the enemy is not even limited to the military, as Milo Minderbinder's great capitalistic
structure, M & M Enterprises, illustrates. This is a world where the few identifiable good guys can be hit from any direction—where Doc Daneeka can be reported "killed" (350), where Chaplain Tappman can be forced to wonder "How many angels could dance on the head of a pin?" (275), and where Nately's whore's kid sister threatens Yossarian with a bread knife. Yossarian's resistance to this world and the reader's memory of linear logic are all that provide the contrast necessary to make this absurd world comic. Yossarian "jumps" at the novel's end in hopes of finding an alternative to this circular treadmill in escape to Sweden, but that this attempt, like Huck's decision to "light out for the Territory," is undermined is indicated by Nately's whore's lunge at him as he takes off.

What have we established so far? We have found an answer to the question, "What is the basic form of comedy?" in the contrasts that give these examples a quality of doubleness. In many cases this contrast can be seen to conform with the basic contrast Bergson found conducive to "Laughter," "something mechanical encrusted on the living." This we found in the comic devices of rhyme, nonsense, puns, malapropisms, parody, and mock epic and in these types of comedy: farce, the comedy of manners, satire, and mad comedy. But in
other cases we found a second kind of contrast along with this first one. In clowning, besides the contrast between machine-like rigidity and human flexibility, we found sometimes a contrasting sadness. If folk humor, besides exaggeration and understatement which can be seen as mechanical encrustations, we found an additional contrast between naïveté and sophistication. In the comedy of humors à la Sterne, besides the contrast between eccentricity and conformity, we found a curious combination of comic laughter and humorous empathy. In still other cases the basic form we find, though still a contrast, is not the contrast between mechanical rigidity and human flexibility that Bergson sees as uniting all. The contrast in dialect between "standard" English and a folksy or idiosyncratic usage, though similar, seems not to fit under Bergson's general category. The brevity of wit would seem to be a refined flexibility of language rather than an encrustation of mechanical rigidity. In fabliaux the main contrast seems to be the one Freud describes between inhibition against obscenity (sexual and scatological) and hostility, and temporary relief from that inhibition. And finally the absence of any standards as in Absurd comedy seems not to contrast with the presence of standards as a mechanical set would.
One way of coming to understand these differences with Bergson's theory is to look at how he answers the second of our two questions, "What is the nature of our response to comedy?" Because Bergson deals only with the comic and excludes the humorous, we can infer that the response he is explaining is the strictly intellectual recognition of a departure from normal behavior--human, social, or linguistic. This response fits quite well with the contrasts in the group in which we are in agreement with Bergson. We can be brought into further agreement if we add to this response the empathetic response Meredith describes as appropriate to humor. A mixed response in which we both laugh at and feel with the characters of comedy is appropriate to the second group here. This concurrent sympathy with a comic character makes Meredith's idea of the effect of comedy, that it "appeals to the individual mind to perceive and participate in the social," more subtle than Bergson's statement, which better describes ridicule, "Now, it is the business of laughter to repress any separatist tendency. Its function is to convert rigidity into plasticity, to readapt the individual to the whole, in short, to round off the corners wherever they are met with."41 Still, in both cases I think we have a confusion of effect and cause. Rather than finding the
cause of our laughter in such socialization, it would be
more logical to look for it in the deviation from the
norm since it is this that generally makes up the bulk
of the comedy, the resolving socialization coming only
at the end. Certainly this deviation is found in the
third group of varieties of comedy, those which we cannot
otherwise reconcile with Bergson's theory. Investigation
of how this larger category, deviation from the norm,
works to produce comic and humorous responses will be
the task of the remaining chapters.
CHAPTER 2
COMEDY AS PLAY

Chapter 1 concluded with the idea that the cause of our laughter at comedy lies in deviation from the norm. Henri Bergson himself offers hints as to an area of human life which is characterized by deviation from the norm and which comedy resembles. It is play. Bergson finds no break in continuity between the child's delight in games and that of the grown-up person in comedy. Then he seeks "in the games that amused us as children, the first faint traces of the combinations that make us laugh as grown-up persons." His search for the form of comedy we have found very suggestive of the basic doubleness of comedy. But his conception of the game of comedy as one of imitation leads him into the error of regarding the effect of comedy as the rational satisfaction of return to the social norm. More convincing is the irrational satisfaction in the deviation from the norm that Bergson suggests when he compares comedy to "the play of dreamland." He is quite right to suggest that we treat the comic character as a playmate and with him enter a world like that of a dream in which "the mind, enamoured of itself, now seeks
in the outer world nothing more than a pretext for realizing its imaginations."6

This comparison of comedy to the play of dreamland must remind us of Sigmund Freud and his comparison of jokes and dreams. In his case, too, we find hints of deviation from the norm in a return to the play of childhood. In his chapter on "Jokes and the Species of the Comic" Freud picks up the hint from Bergson that we have just noted.7 Earlier in this book he acknowledged play as the first preliminary stage of jokes.8 In a later essay he discusses "Humour" in terms of a parental super-ego comforting a childlike ego.9 Here he is tempted to make the statement that "'those things are comic which are not proper for an adult,'" suggesting that the "comic is based fundamentally on degradation to being a child."10 Perhaps Freud would have committed himself to this statement if he had had a more adequate conception of play. As it is, he accepts Karl Groos's idea of play as practice11 and goes on to emphasize the method of imitation saying, "Mimicry is the child's best art and the driving motive of most of his games."12 With a better conception of play he might have come to emphasize the recollected pleasure of uninhibited childhood and to see the comic as like jokes in being a relief from inhibition rather than, as he did, stressing a quantitative
comparison between an adult's thought and action and a child's and concluding that the comic resembles jokes only in being another way of saving psychic energy.

**Piaget's Theory of Play**

A definition of play that would have enabled Bergson and Freud to see a more profound connection between comedy and play and, thus, to describe the working of comedy more convincingly is that given us by Jean Piaget. In *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood* he presents play as the opposite of imitation. He defines play as activity oriented toward one pole of behavior, a pole characterized by assimilation of external things to the self, while imitation is activity oriented toward the opposite pole, a pole characterized by accommodation of the self to external things. In his explanation of play\(^{13}\) Piaget shows how various criteria said to characterize play can all be seen in terms of assimilation. These include its being autotelic, spontaneous, pleasureable, unorganized, free from conflicts, and overmotivated.

Of course, most behavior falls between these two poles and consists of a mixture of assimilation and accommodation. Intelligence consists of an equilibrium between the self and the world. Piaget divides play into three classes, which follow each other as the predominant form in successive states of childhood. They each contain
different admixtures of imitation. The first, practice play, is inextricably related to physical adaptation, and this close relationship has led many theorists to emphasize the ends that play can serve. But play's own motivation is pleasure. The second class or stage, symbolic play, is almost pure assimilation, though within it one can recognize various admixtures of accommodation. The last category, games with rules, is closely related to social adaptation and contains such a strong dose of imitation that such games are often thought to be characterized by it. But they can still be seen as play when the measure of assimilation outweighs that of accommodation. Make-believe and games with rules are so clearly the main components of play that any theory that fails to account for both their similarity and their difference founders. Piaget's theory of play surmounts this difficulty. It convincingly characterizes play activity in terms of assimilation and it distinguishes play from related activities clearly but without creating any artificial boundaries, by allowing the admixture of accommodation to such assimilation.

Practice Games

In order for us to understand Piaget's theory in concrete terms and to see more precisely how he differs from other theorists, let us look more closely at his
three classes or stages. Piaget acknowledges the usefulness of Groos's definition of play as practice to describe the earliest stage of play. In this stage, which is predominant from birth to about two years old and which recurs whenever a new skill is acquired, the child repeats a sensory-motor activity simply for the functional pleasure or, if an object is involved, for the pleasure Groos described, the joy in being a cause. Mental skills can also be practiced for the sheer pleasure of their exercise, but because of their nature as acts of thought they tend to develop into symbolic games.

The first category of play, practice games, is characterized by the functional assimilation on the fringes of adaptation, while the middle category, symbolic games, is characterized by a more extreme form of assimilation, the assimilation of reality to the child's desires or interests by the process of symbolization.

**Symbolic Games**

This middle stage, in which play is most truly itself, stretches from the age at which a child begins to acquire language to about age seven, when games with rules become predominant. The first half of this stage, ages two to four, produces simple forms of make-believe such as the identification of one object with another or the identification of the child's body with that of other
people or with things and more complex combinations of symbols in which scenes from the child's life are recreated merely for the pleasure of reproducing them or for the purpose of correcting reality by compensation or for the purpose of liquidating a situation by transposing it or for the purpose of handling anticipated consequences or punishment by trying them out on an imaginary companion. Here we see some rather bald examples of the adoption of a strategy to encompass a situation, which Burke sees as basic to a work of literature. They are bald because they are so purely assimilative to the self. In the second half of the stage of symbolic play, ages four to seven, the games are characterized by more accommodation to the environment. These symbolic games are more orderly, have greater verisimilitude, and may be played by two or more with the necessary differentiation and adjustment of roles.

This category of play, symbolic games, is illustrated by Constance Rourke's *American Humor: A Study of the National Character*, and the ideas of this book are in turn illuminated by Piaget's idea of symbolic play. In contrast to those who have said that America had no childhood, Rourke argues that it had a prolonged childhood. Its most typical "characters," the Yankee
peddler, the backwoodsman, and the Negro slave, are all shown by Rourke to be rebels, even outcasts. "Each in a fashion of his own had broken bonds, the Yankee in the initial revolt against the parent civilization, the backwoodsman in revolt against all civilization, the Negro in a revolt which was cryptic and submerged but which none the less made a perceptible outline."16 Their characteristic language shows both a revolt against and a playing with their various language backgrounds—the Yankee lingo, with its consciously assumed oddities; the backwoodsman's extravagant language, coming out of the yeasty English of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and producing its mock pompous words; and, of course, the Negro's earthy dialect, with its African borrowings and disguised satire. Rourke can offer no explanation for the unexpected bent American literature took. "A young people might have been expected to produce a literature greatly concerned with the present and the tangible; but this expression was often concerned with the highly intangible; it turned continually toward the illusive province of inner fantasy."17 She might not have found this bent so unexpected had she followed through her idea of America's extended childhood. What do children do? They play. She does understand how the rebellious
American types used comedy as a defense against, even an affirmation in the face of, the difficulties, even terrors, in front of them. "Comic resilience swept through them in waves, transcending the past, transcending terror, with the sense of comedy, itself a wild emotion."18

Games with Rules

It is easy to see in the latter half of the stage of symbolic games a progression toward the development of games in which rule has replaced symbol. These social games characterize the last period of childhood and continue as the predominant form of games throughout adult life. Though games with rules are still marked off from reality, their development parallels the decline not only of symbolic play but of play in general as the child, rather than assimilating reality to himself, tries to adjust to reality and by the incorporation of imitation reach an intelligent adaptation.19

It is obviously this category of play, games with rules, that Elizabeth Sewell uses in her book on nonsense. She shows nonsense to be a game and defines game in this way:

A GAME: the active manipulation, serving no useful purpose, of a certain object or class of objects, concrete or mental, within a limited field of space and time and according to fixed rules, with the aim of producing a given result despite the opposition of chance and/or opponents. . . .
These are the essentials of play, and three things follow from them. First, the player must consent to play. . . . Secondly, the player must have something to manipulate; you cannot play with the totally non-existent. Thirdly, whatever it is that is to be manipulated in play must be within your control.20

In her last chapter she more fully discusses what she calls the other half of play, make-believe. While she, like Piaget, connects it with dream, she describes it in terms opposite to his description of symbolic play. She says, "The logical type of play is a manipulation of things, and this held good in Nonsense; but this other type of play is a putting oneself into things, not the moving of bodies (be they cards or counters or 'abstract bodies', if one may use the phrase, such as words in the head), but perhaps something to do with the body itself, and movement."21 This can be seen as a mere physical distinction, and indeed Sewell goes on to discuss the dance as half game, half make-believe, but in her remarks on both dance and make-believe she uses imagery which connects them with the idea of the player's being played with by forces outside himself. I do not want to deny the influence of the unknowable on art, but in this case I think Piaget's psychological explanation of the connection between the unconscious symbolism of the dream and the assimilation of symbolic play is more useful. For instance, Piaget's theory with
its shading between symbolic games and games with rules helps us to understand why some nonsense is funny, a question standing outside Sewell's endeavor. "Laughter," she says, "is incidental to Nonsense but not essential to it."22 I am quite ready to admit that nonsense is not to be identified with the comic and that as a game with rules it can be as unequivocably absorbing as symbolic play can be. But what about the nonsense that does make us laugh? How does it work? I think it works by making us conscious of the fact that its rules are not those of reality, that its rules are made up by the player, often in contradistinction to the rules of reality.

**Play and Art**

Piaget's theory of play would seem to be useful in helping us understand the way in which certain works of art, particularly comic works, produce their effects, but what can we say about the relationship of play to art in general and of play to comedy in particular? Johan Huizinga points to the most basic relationship between play and art. In *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* he urges us to see play as motivating such primary human developments as ritual.23 He goes on to argue with Harrison on the way in which art arises out of ritual, stressing a common denominator of play, ritual, and art which is reminiscent of Burke's
"symbolic action." Huizinga describes play in this way:

Summing up the formal characteristics of play we might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside "ordinary" life as being "not serious", but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means.24

As Huizinga himself points out, some of the characteristics enumerated "are proper to play in general, others to social play in particular."25 He does not concern himself with the distinction because it is only the latter that he is interested in. We will be concerned with the distinction because, while it is surely arguable that such social play leads on to the production of culture and it may also be arguable that manual play forms a bridge between games and work and itself leads to the production of cultural objects, including works of literature, we are interested primarily in an earlier stage of play to which we return in comedy, the stage Piaget describes as "symbolic."

I have already indicated that Piaget sees his category of practice games as akin to Groos's idea of play as pre-exercise of instinctive functions. But he objects both to Groos's derivation of the make-believe
stage and to his idea that imagination is such a function that can be pre-exercised. He might have based his objections on Groos's emphasis on imitation, one which Freud picked up as central. Groos deals with imitation as essential to play instead of handling it in the more satisfactory way of an admixture to play proper, as Piaget does. Nevertheless, though Groos finds a too direct connection between play and art through their common use of imitation, he does make a distinction that is useful to us as we try to apply the concept of play to comedy. It is that aesthetic enjoyment is more closely akin to play than is artistic production. I have already indicated one additional requirement for artistic production—the technical skills that may arise out of manual play, a category Piaget places between play proper and work. Another requirement is indicated in Piaget's conception of creative imagination, which includes more than the assimilation of symbolic games and results only when this symbolic assimilation is reintegrated in thought as a whole. But we can find here support for the premise that the audience's response reflects the basic form of a work of literature and the basic form is itself a product of the artist's motivation in adopting a particular strategy to encompass a situation. Of course, this
premise covers any literary work, but in this chapter I will try to show that the essential characteristic of play, assimilation, is emphasized in comedy.

The connection between true symbolic play and the strategy of the literary work in which author and audience meet is as true for tragedy as for comedy. Both Lionel Trilling and Jean Piaget invoke Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Trilling to help explain tragic catharsis, Piaget to explain how symbolic games of liquidation can be brought under the criterion of pleasure-seeking through the concept of assimilation of reality to the ego. Trilling applies the repetition-compulsion of some dreams and some play to the theory of tragedy and concludes that our pleasure in it may consist at least in part of the sense of active mastery that such a confrontation with pain can produce. Though he is speaking of tragedy he suggests parenthetically that a similar set of connections may hold for comedy as well.\(^{27}\) I suggest that with a greater emphasis on assimilation and the pleasure principle rather than on accommodation and the reality principle the effect of comedy may be so explained.

**Play and Comedy**

Still another theorist's discussion of play may help us discover why laughter is a response common to
play and comedy. It is Helmuth Plessner's in his book *Laughing and Crying: A Study of the Limits of Human Behavior*. Though Plessner's discussion lacks the clarity provided by Piaget's division of play into the categories of practice, symbol, and rule and his emphasis on assimilation as play's essence, it does provide an insight on how symbolic play can produce laughter. Plessner looks at the occasions of laughing and crying in terms of what he calls man's eccentric position. According to this image of man's essential nature, he not only both is and has a body, but also, unlike animals, knows of this paradoxical relationship. Thus we are able to relate to the external world in paradoxical ways. The situation of the symbolic player can be seen as ambiguous in two ways. First, the domain of play is an area of assimilation which is shut off from accommodation, but the consciousness of that reality outside this appearance is still present. Second, the bond of play is one in which the player both controls the situation and its objects and is controlled by them. When such ambivalence exists (and symbolic play may be either more totally absorbing or more consciously under the player's control and thus not produce this sense of paradox), the child reacts with laughter. In this reaction, according to Plessner, the body takes over the
answer to such an unanswerable situation and thereby restores the sovereignty of the person with his eccentric position.29

Plessner's characterization of play as the first occasion of true laughter30 and his statement that the comic and wit occasion laughter in its full development31 indicate the connection that I am trying to establish here. In his discussion of the comic he departs from Bergson's view that the central phenomenon is the conflict between vitality and stiffness and instead maintains that it is any contrariety which seeks to be accepted as a unity. He finds this contrariety in unity specifically in deviation from a norm, the conclusion our first chapter indicated. He points out that man's eccentric position often enables him to deviate from a norm while at the same time acknowledging it. One can easily relate this ambiguous position to that of the child involved in symbolic play. Deviation, like the process of symbolization, is a form of assimilation while the norm can be seen as the necessity of accommodation. Plessner presents wit as the special form of the comic in language. The unbridgeable gap between word and fact is a condition any semanticist would acknowledge. The joke confirms this contrariety in concrete unity by bringing together various meanings
at a point of intersection. \textsuperscript{32} Man's response to the unanswered situations posed by the comic and wit is again turned over to the body and he laughs, thus reasserting his personhood. \textsuperscript{33}

Freud's point that children play before they develop a sense of humor urges me to make an important concession of difference between play and comedy at the outset of applying the theory of play to comic works. Our enjoyment of a comic work cannot be seen as playing. Those of us past the age of seven have already entered the stage at which play is mostly games with rules and those of us past eleven have almost eliminated games of practice and symbolic games from our repertoire. It is my contention that it is precisely this maturity on our part that makes a return to the pleasures of pure play in the form of comedy so satisfying. Thus, though I may emphasize elements of practice, symbol, and rule in various creations of comedy, they are actually inextricably related in a purely assimilative rebellion against the accommodation-requiring rules of the physical, psychological, social, and philosophical environment, such practice of one's individual powers as is done purely for pleasure being, in its refusal to be useful, yet another form of assimilative rebellion.
With this proviso in mind, let us look at some examples of comedy to see how comparison with play can help us to understand their deviation from a norm and the consequent production of comic response. In Rabelais' comedy of the body we can see a comparison with sensory practice play; in clowning we can see a comparison with motor practice play; in various kinds of verbal comedy we can see a comparison with linguistic practice play. In a folk comic character--Anse Bundren of *As I Lay Dying*--and a Shakespearean low comic character--Nick Bottom of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*--we can see how purely assimilative characters bring forth a comic response. Then the idea of games with rules may help us understand our mixed response to the humor of adolescence. And we will also see how other mixed forms such as satire, mad comedy, and Absurd comedy only border on play.

**Rabelais' Comedy of the Body**

Rabelais' *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel* recall a pleasure more basic even than that of sensory practice play. It is the pleasure of receiving nourishment. Being gigantic even as infants both Gargantua and later his son, Pantagruel, require prodigious amounts of milk. For the provision of Gargantua's milk diet 17,913 cows are set aside, though some say, in what is declared to be
mammilary scandal, that his mother could have supplied 1402 barrels and nine pails per feeding herself. Since Pantagruel's mother died at his birth, there is no question of her nursing him; instead 4600 cows provide milk for each of his feedings. Encouraged to suck one of these bovine donors, he unfortunately adds hunger to his thirst and devours her as well. Such gigantic hunger is emphasized throughout their lives, but their stupendous thirst for wine receives even more emphasis, presumably because wine has the additional property of producing in us a playful intoxicated state. This is emphasized from Gargantua's first cry through the reiteration of Pantagruel's being the "little devil" of thirst. It is interesting to speculate what a modern Rabelais might have said about "Pantagruelion" or Cannabis sativa; I think he would have emphasized less its ability to resist fire.

Rabelais moves from the recall of this most basic pleasure of nourishment on to a glorification of the body's parts that can be compared to Piaget's sensory practice play. The author has great fun exploring among the molars in Pantagruel's St. Sophie's of a mouth. And Pantagruel, meanwhile, is putting his lengthy tongue to a more beneficent use than children often do by shielding his entire army from the rain
with it. Naturally those seductive parts, the genitals, are also celebrated. The best example of this is seen in those ancestors of Pantagruel whose indulgence in medlars produced members which "were so long that they employed them as girdles, wrapping them five or six times around their bodies."

But perhaps such sensory practice play is not the most significant kind of play to be found in Gargantua and Pantagruel. Perhaps more important is the symbolic play with these giants. For older children, frustrated by their inability to control their world, such giant figures may offer opportunities for assimilation of the liquidating kind or, more appropriate to the point of view in these books, of the compensatory kind. Similarly, tiny figures offer the same opportunities, liquidating, if the identification is with the small models, or, as here, compensatory, by being a part of the audience of such minute creatures. For adults the identification with bodies of such "gargantuan" size may represent a return to the very early stage when as infants our world was ourselves.

Besides the primary pleasure of nourishment, the appreciation of the body's parts, the pleasure of identifying with gigantic figures, Rabelais invokes another pleasure, one that might be compared to later
manual and social play. There is an evident delight in feces, not only in the creative process, but also in the extra added attraction of rump-wiping. Surely all children share these delights and some add creative play with this primal modeling clay, an early example of Piaget's manual play. And Pantagruel's drowning an army of enemies with his urine no doubt awakens memories of victories in the urine-shooting games of the males in Rabelais' audience, a kind of play that adds the competition of social play to the functionalism of practice play.

The pleasure an adult gets out of Rabelaisian body humor is surely based in part on the release of inhibition Freud talks about, as well as being a retreat to a more basic level of development which is glorified or at least affirmed. Rabelais was himself participating in a Renaissance revolution which asserted the goodness of man's natural life as opposed to the medieval concept of the wretchedness of the body. Erich Auerbach emphasizes this aspect of Rabelaisian realism in his book *Mimesis*, significantly stressing Rabelais' "playing with things."35 While his medieval predecessors had to work to establish the hierarchical linearity of the Great Chain of Being, Rabelais could take that idea of order for granted and instead emphasize
the correlative principle of "plenitude," an emphasis that seems a playful indulgence in the possibilities of a fairly low order of existence rather than a concentration on the oppressive order itself.

The Clown as Inept Hero

While the practice play recalled by Rabelais' comedy of the body is primarily that of sensing oneself, clowning mainly recalls the play of practicing the more advanced motor skills, such as walking. Here our pleasure comes not from a sense of social superiority, as Bergson theorizes, nor from a sense of physical superiority, as Freud suggests happens when we compare the amount of cathexis we require to produce an action with the excessive cathexis of the clown, but from an identification, similar to that with Rabelais' giants, of ourselves with the clown as a kind of physical hero. Of course, he is not the physical hero the acrobat is and the child's enjoyment of the clown's act is less the pleasure of repeating successful motor adaptations than the enjoyment of ineptitude without pain. The clown trips over his own big-shoed feet, just as the child learning to walk does, but instead of suffering the usual consequences of such a defiance of gravity, he springs back up as if he were made of rubber. As if to emphasize this success of ineptitude the clown often
wanders into the acrobats' act, where in spite of his awkwardness he miraculously survives being shot from a cannon. To a child, still struggling to achieve physical competence, such escapist ineptitude is satisfying enough, but an adult, with that battle far in the past, requires the additional implication of mental and social ineptitude, such as is suggested in the tear-streaked eyes and down-turned mouth of the clown's make-up and is a major component of most of the Little Tramp's escapades. The clowning appreciated by the adult shades off into mime, perhaps the adult equivalent of acrobatics, where, to the physical feat of imitating actions without the aid of the voice is added the difficulty of portraying emotions without using words.

**Verbal Comedy**

Linguistic skills, like sensory-motor skills, are acquired by practice, and language can be played with in its form as well as its content. That children practice the linguistic skills they are acquiring when under no necessity to communicate is indicated in this pre-sleep monologue of a two-and-a-half-year-old named Anthony Weir as recorded by his mother:

Put on a blanket--White blanket--And yellow blanket--Where's yellow blanket. . . .
Yellow blanket--Yellow light. . . . There is the light--Where is the light--Here is the light."37

The child's development of language is aptly accompanied by his development of assimilative play since both are representational in nature, though Piaget is quick to point out that language consists of signs chosen arbitrarily by social convention while the child's play utilizes symbols motivated by his feelings and concrete experiences.38 In the various examples of verbal comedy we can see how the individual's symbolization dominates over arbitrary signification.

When children themselves begin to produce verbal comedy, their productions can be seen as a kind of rebellion against the rules that serious use of language imposes on them. Children may obtain comic pleasure merely by using a word in a meaningless way. Such "dumb" language products make them and their childish companions squeal with delight, as many a harried pre-school carpool driver could testify. Their graduation to "dumb" punning as in the "Knock, knock" and "Little Moron" jokes may at first be a relief to their adult auditors, but constant repetition causes these to pale, at least in parental opinion. Finally
children may enjoy the production of rhyme and the creation of a "secret" language as well in their use of "pig Latin." Such verbal comedy shared by blood brothers or sisters or one's own gang reminds us again of Piaget's social games with rules and Huizinga's exclusive play groups.

The reader can look back at Chapter 1 for examples of such verbal comedy as rhyme, nonsense, dialect, puns, malapropisms, wit, parody, and mock epic. What I would like to suggest here is that the doubleness we found in these examples can now be seen as a reversion to the playful use of language rather than being held to the requirement of serious use.

In Chapter 1 I suggested that in a consonant-dominated language like English, rhyme, with its vowel repetition, is likely to seem a violation of the rules. The comic poet emphasizes such wrenching of language by attention-grabbing further contortions and by obvious trickery. Byron involves us in a language game in Don Juan.

The discussion in the theoretical part of this chapter of Sewell on nonsense should have make clear that comic nonsense appeals to us by giving us a sense of freedom from the demand that language make a conventional kind of sense. Lewis Carroll creates this
sense of linguistic rebellion by maintaining the rules of grammar but thwarting their pressure toward making conventional sense by filling such syntax with nonsense words. These words in themselves show a similar tension. They are often what Carroll later had Humpty Dumpty explain as "portmanteau words." Such words utilize normal words but pack them up in combinations of the inventor's and then his audience's own choosing.

When we think of dialect as an incorrect form of language which we are temporarily getting away with using, we can see it as rebellious play. But when we conceive of it as an older form of our own language or as language closer to the natural world than our own city-refined, artificial language, we can see the use of dialect as more like practice play.

Similarly puns can be seen as acts of linguistic rebellion but they can also be seen as showing off one's language-handling abilities. Our pleasure in puns consists in our giving certain words a ridiculous, idiosyncratic meaning rather than their normally accepted one. In the quadruple pun used as an example in the preceding chapter, the words of the Mann Act, "It is illegal to transport young girls across a state line for immoral purposes," are given an absurd double by transforming the "girls" into "gulls," replacing the
"line" with a "lion," shifting from "immoral" to "immortal" grounds, and concerning ourselves with "porpoises" rather than "purposes." Bergson points out that what we have here is an example of the comic created by language rather than just expressed by language. And he is surely right in seeing such a use of language as individual rather than social. But I think he is wrong in placing the onus "mechanical" on the individual. Language in its social convention is what is mechanical. Such an individually arbitrary use only points this up. Freud's suggestion that the pleasure we derive from such innocent word-play jokes is the result of the psychic energy saved by the lifting of the inhibition against such childish nonsense\(^\text{39}\) comes closer to describing the feeling we get from such a pun. But he overlooks the linguistic factor Bergson emphasizes. The inhibition against nonsense lies in the nature of language itself and restrains the child as well as the adult. But the more elaborately contrived pun gives its perpetrator a chance to display his virtuoso mastery of language as well as his rebellion against the restriction that he will always use words in socially conventional ways. Thus, in both cases, that of the child and that of the adult, the concept of play as unaccommodated assimilation helps us locate the source of the pleasure of punning.
The closer we are to such an act of linguistic rebellion the more we enjoy it. It is more fun to contrive a pun than merely to pass it on, and it is more fun to tell a pun than just to hear it.

The existence of the malapropism, a kind of cross between a pun and a Freudian slip, provides us with further evidence that verbal comedy can be seen as the revolt of the assimilative individual against the accommodation-demanding society. A criticism Piaget makes of Freud helps us to understand the connection between puns and malapropisms. Piaget argues that the distinction between the conscious and the unconscious should be more functional and less topographical and that conscious and unconscious symbolism are not separate but form a continuous whole, unconscious symbolism being merely the extreme of assimilation where no distinction is made between the ego and reality.\textsuperscript{40}

Conceiving of this connection it is easy to see how the conscious assimilation of punning blends with unconscious assimilation to produce the malapropism. Indeed Freud, too, almost acknowledges the connection, though still emphasizing the topographical distinction of the conscious and the unconscious, when he indicates that "the joke . . . is the contribution made to the comic from the realm of the unconscious."\textsuperscript{41} I would argue
that if we do not side with Mrs. Malaprop and Win Jenkins in their individualistic use of language, we certainly side with Sheridan and Smollett who, in their creation of these maladroit users of language, manage to make their own rebellion against the rules of language and of the society which devised it.

Freud has shown how wit in the form of jokes can serve aggressive purposes and obtain temporary relief from inhibition. He suggests that the form of such jokes may, like their content, produce pleasure through a saving of psychic energy. I would add, using Piaget's concept of practice play, that the pleasure of showing off one's mastery of language by producing wit's pithy statements might offer additional compensation, enough to offset the effort that has gone into such a production.

We have seen in the preceding chapter how parody and mock epic can be used satirically to point up a contrast existing in reality. Fielding's Shamela by parodying Richardson's Pamela points to the prurience disguised in that puritanical novel. The Rape of the Lock points to the discrepancy between the trivial deed of cutting off the lock of hair and the excessive consequence of the alienation of two families. We have also seen how parody and mock epic can be done in such
a way as to show appreciation for the style parodied or for the subject mocked. Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* appreciatively parodies *Don Quixote*. Joyce's *Ulysses* glorifies as well as ridicules Leopold Bloom. Moreover, we can see in these examples a pleasure similar to that of play--the pleasure of being able to recreate such styles and the further pleasure of manipulating them.

**A Comic Folk Hero**

Rourke's study of the humorous American character sheds light on one of Faulkner's characters, Anse Bundren. The extravagant exaggeration and gross understatement that developed in the super-rebellion that American folk humor became helps us understand a grotesquely comic character like Anse. Of course, it is possible to take Anse seriously and to regard him as a little man who nevertheless acts heroically or, more likely, as an uncomprehending villain. But I believe all would agree that Anse's most distinguishing characteristic is a colossal egoism. Seeing this egoism in terms of the assimilation of the external world to the self of the playing child helps us to understand why a comic response to him is appropriate. It convinces me that Irving Howe's estimate of Anse is substantially accurate: "In drawing Anse, Faulkner may have had in mind one or another important moral lesson; more probably, he had struck upon
a universal comic type, the tyrannically inept *schlemiel* whose bumbling is so unrelieved and sloth so unalloyed that he ends by evoking only an impatient, irritated sympathy."  

Anse's selfishness is so total and he is so completely unconscious of it that we are finally brought to the point where our exasperation breaks over into laughter. He assumes that everything he needs is coming to him by right and blandly wards off criticism. He is impervious to the needs of others, and, when they suffer, he concentrates on the inconvenience their suffering causes him. He expropriates the money Cash has been saving for a "graphophone" and Jewel's prized horse to pay towards the new mule team. When Jewel protests, he points to his own self-sacrifice of the money he was planning to use for some false teeth. "'I give that money. I thought that if I could do without eating, my sons could do without riding. God knows I did.'"  

But he soon recoups this loss by taking the ten dollars Dewey Dell got from Lafe for an abortion drug. When she protests that the money is not hers and that if he takes it, he will be a thief, he cleverly seizes on this and says self-pityingly, "'It's just a loan. God knows, I hate for my blooden children to reproach me. But I give them what was mine
without stint. Cheerful I give them, without stint. And now they deny me. Addie. It was lucky for you you died, Addie" (246). No wonder Armstid says, "Because be durn if there aint something about a durn fellow like Anse that seems to make a man have to help him, even when he knows he'll be wanting to kick himself next minute. . . . I be durn if Anse dont conjure a man, someway. I be durn if he aint a sight" (183-184). Though it is Anse who insists on putting the concrete cast on Cash's leg (since they have "done bought the cement, now"), when Mr. Gillespie criticizes both the idea and the execution, "'I just aimed to help him,' pa said. 'It was Darl put it on'" (214). And this same self-justification, without any sign of being conscious of any charge to justify himself against is seen in his saying, "'You all dont know what it is. You never pure loved her, none of you'" (218). It never seems to occur to Anse that he, rather than Cash, who is working on the coffin, be the one to get wet in the shortage of one raincoat. Nor does it occur to him that anyone else be allowed to drive the wagon up hills where everyone but the driver walks to lighten the load. Though Anse has contributed to the delays that have lengthened the funeral journey to six days, he begrudges the time Dewey Dell wants "to go to the bushes."
"'Dont be no longer than you can help,' pa says. 'We aint got no time to waste'" (218). His view of the danger that Darl might be committed to an asylum is that they are 'trying to short-hand me with the law' (36). After Cash has broken his leg in the accident at the ford, "'A fellow might call it lucky it was the same leg he broke when he fell offen that church,' pa says. 'But I dont begrudge her it'" (156). And when it becomes apparent that Darl will have to be locked up or the family face a lawsuit from Gillespie, Anse says, "'God knows, it's a trial on me. Seems like it aint no end to bad luck when once it starts'" (223). Outrage is not a sufficient response here; only laughter will do.

Anse in action must be seen in terms of inertia, an inertia we can see as a refusal to accommodate himself to the rest of the world. His refusal to accommodate himself to other human beings can be seen in any number of descriptions of him as animal-like, including this one by Darl: "Pa leans above the bed in the twilight, his humped silhouette partaking of that owl-like quality of awry-feathered, disgruntled outrage within which lurks a wisdom too profound or too inert for even thought" (48). What small actions he takes are similarly unaccommodated and he manages to crumble everything he touches. "He moves again and falls to shifting the planks, picking
them up, laying them down again carefully, as though they are glass. He goes to the lantern and pulls at the propped raincoat until he knocks it down and Cash comes and fixes it back" (74). Anse's "philosophy" is basically a justification of inertia:

"When He aims for something to be always a-moving, He makes it longways, like a road or a horse or a wagon, but when He aims for something to stay put, He makes it up-and-down ways, like a tree or a man. And so he never aimed for folks to live on a road, because which gets there first, I says, the road or the house? Did you ever know Him to set a road down by a house? I says. No you never, I says, because it's always men cant rest till they gets the house set where everybody that passes in a wagon can spit in the doorway, keeping the folks restless and wanting to get up and go somewheres else when He aimed for them to stay put like a tree or a stand of corn. Because if He'd a aimed for man to be always a-moving and going somewheres else, wouldn't He a put him longways on his belly, like a snake? It stands to reason He would. (34-35)

Even his most heroic act, his leading his wife's six-day, forty-mile funeral procession, is motivated by inertia. Here is Samson's analysis of Anse's moving: "I notice how it takes a lazy man, a man that hates moving, to get set on moving once he does get started off, the same as he was set on staying still, like it aint the moving he hates so much as the starting and the stopping. And like he would be kind of proud of whatever come up to make the moving or the setting still look hard" (108). His movement is also characterized by a
lack of accommodation. He seems to find it difficult
to believe that Tull's bridge is also out and his
progress blocked.

"If it was just up, we could drive
across," Anse says. "We could drive right
on across it."

"If the bridge was just up," Anse says.
"But it's down," Anse says.
"If it was just up, we could drive
across it," he says. (118-120)

Surely the refusal to accommodate himself to the
external world that is Anse's inertia and the assimilation
of all things to himself with no doubt of desert that is
Anse's selfishness lead us to view him as a child and
elicit from us that impatient, irritated sympathy Howe
notes as a typical response. We may even envy him his
privileged position while appreciating the feelings of
those he exploits.

A Shakespearean Comic Player

If Anse's status as a comic folk hero is problematical
because of his appearance in a work which is an intricate
mixture of comic and tragic elements, Bottom's status
as a consummate comic player is confirmed by his
appearance in one of Shakespeare's most delightful
comedies. From the moment of his first appearance it
is clear that Nick Bottom is a play leader. Peter Quince
is to direct the mechanicals' performance, but Bottom
directs the director (I, ii). Bottom's natural leadership is confirmed by his fellow actors when his disappearance threatens cancellation of their play (IV, ii).

In personality Bottom is the quintessential assimilative child player. His distorting of all things to himself is apparent first of all in his language, which is characterized by malapropisms. He promises, "I will aggravate my voice so that I will roar you as gently as any sucking dove; I will roar you an 'twere any nightingale" (I, ii, 84-86). He agrees, "We will meet; and there we may rehearse most obscenely and courageously" (I, ii, 110-111). Most characteristic of such a ham or assimilative child he wants to play all the parts, especially that of the traditionally ranting tyrant, of which, unfortunately there is not one in this play. But not satisfied with just the male lead, he wants to play the female lead, too. "Let me play Thisby too, I'll speak in a monstrous little voice" (I, ii, 53-54). And when the part of the lion is discussed, he begs, "Let me play the lion too: I will roar, that I will do any man's heart good to hear me; I will roar, that I will make the duke say 'Let him roar again, let him roar again!'" (I, ii, 72-75). Not only does he want to play all the parts, but he is also tempted by all the costumes and cannot make up his mind amongst the various
beards on hand (I, ii, 92-98). He wants more of everything, even of syllables in the lines of verse (III, i, 24-27).

Bottom handles unexpected events with a child's assimilative inventiveness. When his companions run from him, he handles his fear by deciding that they are trying to scare him and he sings to prove to them and to himself that he is not afraid (III, i, 115-131). He rises to the encounter with the enamoured Titania and makes courtly jokes with her (III, i, 145-154).

In this encounter he displays his most childlike characteristic—his literal imagination. He greets her attendant fairies at no loss for words, though his conceits are literal references to Cobweb's utility as a bandage, Peaseblossom's relation to the food family, and Mustardseed's efficacy as a spice (III, i, 182-201). Similarly, he does not fail to take advantage of her offer of favors, though his requests—for scratching, honey, the music of the tongs and bones, and such provender as oats, hay, and dried peas—are rather prosaic (IV, i). With such a literal imagination it is apt that he is made into the literal symbol of an ass.

When he awakes from his dream, he reacts to it as the symbolic child. His reaction is one of faith. In a parody of I Corinthians 2:9, he says, "The eye of man
hath not heard, nor the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream was" (IV, i, 219-223).

But Bottom's literal imagination and that of his mechanical playmates comes out best in planning their play. Bottom shows his complete faith in the illusion they are to create in his concern that the audience will not be able to tell this appearance from reality. To allay the fear that Pyramus is really killed, Bottom proposes, "Write me a prologue; and let the prologue seem to say, we will do no harm with our swords and that Pyramus is not killed indeed; and, for the better assurance, tell them that I Pyramus am not Pyramus, but Bottom the weaver: this will put them out of fear (III, i, 18-23). Similar regard for the tender feelings of his audience prompts him to insist that the lion say, "'If you think that I come hither as a lion, it were pity of my life: no, I am no such thing; I am a man as other men are;' and there indeed let him name his name, and tell them plainly he is Snug the joiner" (III, i, 44-48). But Bottom's literal imagination shows forth even better in his plans for the scenery. Since a real wall is out of the question, Bottom proposes, "Some man or other must present Wall: and let him have some plaster, or some loam, or some rough-cast about him, to signify wall,
and let him hold his fingers thus, and through that cranny shall Pyramus and Thisby whisper" (III, i, 69-73).
Bottom takes his literal imagination to its extreme when he suggests that they use real moonshine as a symbol for itself. But here he is overruled by Quince, who insists that someone must come in with a lanthorn, a thorn-bush, and a dog and thus "disfigure" or present the person of Moonshine (III, i, 57-63). Finally, Bottom shows his complete equation of appearance and reality when he warns his fellow actors to eat no onions or garlic before their performance because it is to be a "sweet comedy."

Bottom's role as the child player is heightened by Theseus' contrasting role as the tolerant yet amused parent. Of all the audience only he is capable of both appreciating the childlike efforts of the mechanical players and of finding fun in their childish failures. Hippolyta is mostly impatiently irritated. Demetrius and Lysander are capable only of making fun of the mechanicals. But Theseus shows the understanding of his speech in which he declares that "The lunatic, the lover and the poet/Are of imagination all compact" (V, i, 7-8), when he says of this play and these players, "The best in this kind are but shadows, and the worst are no worse, if imagination amend them" (V, i, 213-215), and, "If we imagine no worse of them than they of
themselves, they may pass for excellent men" (V, i, 217-219). Theseus leads the others in appreciation of the mechanicals' real live wall (V, i, 166-169). But he cannot resist protesting that the mechanicals' symbolization of the moon has not gone far enough toward literalism. "This is the greatest error of all the rest: the man should be put into the lanthorn," says he. "How is it else the man i' the moon?" (V, i, 250-252).

Throughout the performance Theseus leads the others in pointing up how far the mechanicals' play has liberated itself from the demands of dramatic convention even while striving to conform to them. As if we are not sufficiently aroused by the announcement of "'A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus/And his love Thisbe; very tragical mirth,'" Theseus repeats the joke, "Merry and tragical! tedious and brief:/That is, hot ice and wondrous strange snow./How shall we find the concord of this discord?" (V, i, 56-60), thereby reminding us of the conventional separation of tragedy and comedy and emphasizing the comic characteristic of incongruity. After Quince's idiosyncratically punctuated prologue, Theseus and Lysander remind us of the grammatical convention he has violated while Hippolyta aptly compares him to a child whose "playing" is out of control: "Indeed he hath played upon his
prologue like a child on a recorder: a sound, but not in government" (V, i, 118-127). Thisbe's romantically conventional description of her lover, lying dead before her, calls for no comment: "These lily lips,/This cherry nose,/These yellow cowslip cheeks,/Are gone, are gone:/Lovers, make moan:/His eyes were green as leeks" (V, i, 337-342).

But Theseus is most effective when he acts as a foil to Bottom. It is his suggestion, "The wall, methinks, being sensible, should curse again," that prompts Bottom to break out of the bounds of the play and speak to the audience, assuring them of the play's progress (V, i, 183-189). It is Theseus who comments on the affect produced by Bottom's acting of Pyramus' discovery of Thisbe's seeming death: "This passion, and the death of a dear friend, would go near to make a man look sad" (V, i, 293-294). Upon the death of Pyramus the play on the words die and axe provided by Demetrius and Lysander is capped by Theseus in a statement that both reminds us of Bottom's transformation in the forest and affirms his near immortality: "With the help of a surgeon he might yet recover, and prove an ass" (V, i, 312-317). Finally, Theseus and Demetrius make remarks that provoke Bottom to rise from the dead, pronounce the play's moral, and propose that a Bergomask dance be appropriately appended.
The Humor of Adolescence--A Mixed Response

Though Bottom's childlike symbolic games call forth pure comic delight, the humor of adolescence, with its resemblance to games with rules, may evoke a more mixed response. Such games with rules remind us of practice games though now the adaptation in which we are involved is social rather than physical. The humor of adolescence may amuse us in so far as successful efforts at social adaptation are repeated. But as such adaptation is an ongoing process in which the tension between the individual and society continues to be felt, we may be drawn into a symbolic game of the compensatory or liquidating kind. We might think that the humor of adolescence is a kind of opposite number to a child's playing grown-up. Most people I think do see such children's games as a kind of preparing for future life. But Piaget, in looking closely at actual play, has found that such games tend to recreate experiences that the child has already had and are thus attempts to handle current, not future situations.45 So we and the children are all in the same boat as far as such symbolic actions are concerned. Trilling, as we have seen, suggests how the repetition-compulsion of such play and of some dreams can help explain our involvement in tragedy.

Thus, we may be involved in the humor of adolescence, either by reliving past successes or by re-encountering
certain unfinished struggles. Freud's concept of humor indicates how we can add detachment to our response to the humor of adolescence. By displacing large quantities of cathexis from the ego to the super-ego we enable that agency to perform a comforting parental function and advise its own childlike ego to regard distressing situations as "child's play."

Plessner deals with the clearly demarcated reactions of laughing and crying but his distinctions may help us to understand the mixture of involvement and detachment that we get in the humor of adolescence. He indicates that occasions for laughing are characterized by an ambiguity that emphasizes the relativity of our existence and this disengagement is such that the laughor tries to engage others in his objective situation. On the other hand, occasions for crying are characterized by a distanceless captivation by things that negates the relativity of existence and this emotional binding is such that the crier avoids contact with others as there would inhibit this subjective effect.\(^4^6\) Could it be then that in this mixed mode, the humor of adolescence, we get a tragic effect to the extent that we identify individually with the adolescent protagonist and a comic effect to the extent that we by looking back from an adult situation and by sharing
the re-creation of the experience with others introduce a degree of objectivity and disengagement?

Certainly most works of literature centering on adolescents afford such variant readings. *The Temple of Gold* offers, besides the hilarious scripted telephone call given in Chapter 1, Ray's address to his dead friend, Zock, to the effect that he has given up their search for the "handle," the "temple of gold," a clear understanding of the meaning of life, words that make Ray, and at least this reader, cry. Also quoted in Chapter 1 was a parodic passage from *The Catcher in the Rye*, a passage which illustrated Holden Caulfield's distancing himself from a hurtful situation. The book affords the reader many opportunities for such humorous distancing, especially when it is read communally.

But also given in Chapter 1 was the line immediately following and undermining this tough-guy act, "What I really felt like, though, was committing suicide." The book offers many such insights into the pain underneath the flipness, and such can be especially appreciated when the book is read to oneself. The teenage lovers Romeo and Juliet are comic in the excesses of their courting scenes, but become pathetic, perhaps even tragic, when their love brings them up against an external situation that they fail to handle. Two recent films
show the balance of the humor of adolescence and how it can be tipped to either comic detachment or tragic involvement. *American Graffiti*, with its color, its at least superficially rich variety of activity, and the drag race which threatens death but saves the protagonist, is tipped toward the comic side of the balance. *The Last Picture Show*, with its stark black and white, the barrenness of its setting, and the death of the town's idiot mascot, run over by a truck, tips toward the tragic side.

**Mixed Modes Not to Be Explained as Play**

While the humor of adolescence can be explained at least in part and perhaps wholly by play, such other mixed modes as satire, mad comedy, and Absurd comedy are not to be explained by play. The main discussion of satire will appear in the following chapter, and the final chapter will deal with mad comedy and Absurd comedy. But I think I can indicate here how the works in these three subcategories exceed the boundaries of play. Satire clearly is outside play, and I think outside comedy, too, in its didactic purpose. Play, as Piaget and almost all others have indicated, is autotelic. Play's tendency toward the pole of assimilation makes its only appropriate response enjoyment. Instruction is the result of the opposite tendency, toward the pole
of accommodation. If satire associates itself too entirely with practice to be considered as play, mad comedy is too purely assimilative. Piaget deals with normal development, not with abnormal fixations, but in his connection of the conscious symbolism of play with the unconscious symbolism of dream we can find a basis for the kind of extreme assimilation which Freud or any other psychoanalyst would recognize as insane. In mad comedy the rules may be reversed; Absurd comedy is a game without rules. Of course, one cannot be sure a game with no rules is really a game any more than one can recognize a society with no rules or know a world with no rules.

In this chapter we have seen how play, conceived of as Piaget's unaccommodated assimilation, is one kind of deviation from the norm and how by comparing comedy with such play we can account in part for our laughing response to comedy. But we must admit that an adult's comedy is not identical to a child's play. Their main difference consists in the fact that the adult has passed beyond the stages of practice play, symbolic play, and games with rules and fully entered the real world where the main requirement is intelligent adaptation or accommodated assimilation. We must now look at that required accommodation, the norm from which comedy deviates.
CHAPTER 3

COMEDY AS ESCAPE FROM REPRESSION

Comedy, we have seen, resembles play in being unaccommodated assimilation, but, rather than being an activity of children who have not fully encountered the accommodation demanded by society and the physical world, it is an activity of adults who, in returning to assimilation, are rebelling against the rules, suppressions, inhibitions, repressions, and oppressions that they have had to accept in the course of adaptation. The best description of this aspect of rebellion in comedy is that of Sigmund Freud in his Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious. Because this work is seminal in both the psychoanalytical approach to literature in general and the theory of comedy in particular, I will carefully examine the main points of each of its chapters, indicating my agreements and disagreements with these components of Freud's theory of jokes. Using a comparison with Piaget's idea of assimilation, I will indicate a more positive view of aggression than the one Freud emphasizes and his followers seize on almost exclusively. And I will argue that release of inhibition rather than economy of
psychical energy is the thread common to innocent jokes, tendentious jokes, the comic, and humor.

**Joke Techniques and Doubleness**

"The Techniques of Jokes"¹ Freud finds to be condensation, displacement, absurdity, faulty reasoning, unification, and indirect representation. He connects these techniques of joke-work with those of dream-work. They can also be seen as various ways of producing the doubleness or contrariety in unity that we found in Chapter 1 to be the characteristic form of comedy. And they are also to be found in play, being the means by which the child warps reality into the symbolic shape he wishes and the ways in which he emphasizes the autonomy of his assimilation in the face of the demands of accommodation.

**Aggression as Self-Assertion**

Of more significance are what Freud finds to be "The Purposes of Jokes" (90-116). The main aim of all jokes is to produce pleasure (95), the sole aim, we recall from the preceding chapter, of play as well. But to this main aim tendentious jokes add two other purposes. They may be **hostile** jokes (serving the purpose of aggressiveness, satire, or defense) or **obscene** jokes (serving the purpose of exposure). Freud comments that "these two can themselves be subsumed
under a single heading," presumably aggression (96-97).
Now these terms, aggression, hostility, obscenity, all
bear negative connotations. Freud attempts to deal with
them in a neutral, scientific tone, but even his
presentation, perhaps because of his Victorian situation,
leans toward the negative (See p. 142 for the disposition
of the joker toward neuroses, for instance.). His
followers have disregarded the subtleties of Freud's
argument and the tentativeness of his conclusions and
make flat statements like "Wit begins with an intention
to injure"; "The wit [the joker] as such is hostile,
often with a skillful, artful, highly developed,
sophisticated meanness and viciousness"; "Without it
[his expressed wittiness], he probably would blow his
top or get a migraine attack"; "It is not funny to be
funny."² I do not wish to deny the negativity of
comedy, but when wit comes to be equated with neurosis,
it is obvious that this aspect has been overemphasized.
I believe most people find comedy to be a positive
thing, and I wish to rectify the balance that I think
Freud actually intended by emphasizing here the
affirmation of jokes. If we think of aggression as
synonymous with the assimilation Piaget described,
we can come to this balance. According to this view,
the individual seeks his own pleasure not specifically
in hurting others but merely in disregarding the wishes of others. Freud indicates that, as the reality principle overlays the pleasure principle in the individual (125-127) and as civilization overlays primitivism (101), repression forces us to renounce certain primary means of getting pleasure. The renunciation is not complete, however, and the human psyche makes use of jokes to retrieve the lost pleasure. Thus, we can see the making and enjoyment of jokes as self-assertion, a more neutral term than aggression.

**Obscene Jokes as Seduction**

In discussing obscene jokes Freud first notes that their subject may be excremental as well as sexual since to a child the two are in a sense cloacally combined and the feeling of shame that sets in covers them both (97-98). We have already seen how Rabelais' comedy of the body liberates the original pleasure in the body's excremental products. Such *fabliaux* as "The Miller's Tale" show the natural combination of excremental and sexual obscenity. This tale also shows a situation in which the inhibiting obstacle is not the woman, Alisoun, but her husband, John, who is cruelly dealt with, and to a lesser extent the fop, Absonol, who is scatologically dealt with. Freud's Victorian background is seen in his almost equating the woman
with inhibition—"The obstacle standing in the way is in reality nothing other than women's incapacity to tolerate undisguised sexuality, an incapacity correspondingly increased with a rise in the educational and social level." (101)—and thereby making her the target of an aggression turned sadistic—"it [the held-up sexual aggressiveness] becomes positively hostile and cruel, and it thus summons to its help against the obstacle the sadistic components of the sexual instinct" (99). Thus, he sees sexual jokes more in terms of rape than seduction and insists on the necessity of three people—joker or rapist, obstacle and victim, and witness or laugher. In Chapter 1 we have seen that when the seduction is more mutual, the lady less unwilling, and the inhibition definitely external (and weaker), as in Mirabell and Millamant's discussion of the marriage contract in The Way of the World, the aggression can be purely sexual, not hostile. In contrast to the licentiousness of Congreve's seventeenth-century setting, the Victorianism of the nineteenth century besmirches even Freud's attempts to show sex as affirmed by jokes.

Hostile, Cynical, and Skeptical Jokes

Similarly, we may wonder if hostility itself is a natural drive or one created or at least strengthened
by excessive repression. Freud says, "Since our individual childhood, and, similarly, since the childhood of human civilization, hostile impulses against our fellow men have been subject to the same restrictions, the same progressive repression, as our sexual urges" (102). He goes on to trace the development of fighting into invective and invective into hostile jokes and says, "By making our enemy small, inferior, despicable or comic, we achieve in a roundabout way the enjoyment of overcoming him—to which the third person, who has made no efforts, bears witness by his laughter" (103). The idea of comedy as ridicule has received more than enough attention. Bergson's idea of the efficacy of ridicule in bringing the mechanical deviant back into the flexible social fold and Meredith's more sympathetic version of the same idea, that comedy "appeals to the individual mind to perceive and participate in the social" have been discussed in Chapter 1. But it can be seen here that the inhibition that is triumphed over by a joke is more logically associated with the society as a whole than with any individual, though an individual may, of course, represent the inhibition. Freud, in fact, quickly moves from this discussion of conflict between individuals to a consideration of jokes directed against authority figures and against institutions. These hostile jokes Freud
classifies as cynical. It will be worthwhile to quote two of Freud's example jokes here in order to show in what different ways an attack on a repressing institution can be made. Both jokes feature the Schadchen or marriage-broker.

'The bride groom was most disagreeably surprised when the bride was introduced to him, and drew the broker on one side and whispered his remonstrances: "Why have you brought me here?" he asked reproachfully. "She's ugly and old, she squints and has bad teeth and bleary eyes . . ."--"You needn't lower your voice", interrupted the broker, "she's deaf as well."' (64)

'The Schadchen was defending the girl he had proposed against the young man's protests. "I don't care for the mother-in-law", said the latter. "She's a disagreeable, stupid person."--"But after all you're not marrying the mother-in-law. What you want is her daughter."--"Yes, but she's not young any longer, and she's not precisely a beauty."--"No matter. If she's neither young nor beautiful she'll be all the faithful to you."--"And she hasn't much money."--"Who's talking about money? Are you marrying money then? After all it's a wife that you want."--"But she's got a hunchback too."--"Well, what do you want? Isn't she to have a single fault?"' (61)

In the first of these jokes the broker, though a representative of the institution of marriage-brokerage, becomes a comic character and through the automatism of what we now call a Freudian slip reveals the truth and thus enjoys the freedom of criticizing the institution the abuses of which he well knows. In the second joke the situation seems to be reversed--
the broker is a superior person--but the result is the same--by his sophistical argument defending the institution he shows that its operation is faulty (105-108). We will see later that these two patterns are among those shared by comedy and satire. The element to be stressed in these cynical (critical, blasphemous) jokes is that of rebellion. Of them Freud says, "What these jokes whisper may be said aloud: that the wishes and desires of men have a right to make themselves acceptable alongside of exacting and ruthless morality" (110). To the category of hostile jokes Freud adds one more class, an extremely interesting one the examples of which play with concepts of truth. This class Freud calls skeptical jokes, and of them he says, "What they are attacking is not a person or an institution but the certainty of our knowledge itself, one of our speculative possessions" (115). Such sweeping doubt creates the meaningless world described by Existentialism and calls for pure affirmation in the questioner, a situation which will occupy us in our last chapter.

**How Tendentious Jokes Produce Pleasure**

In his next chapter, "The Mechanism of Pleasure and the Psychogenesis of Jokes" (117-139), Freud attempts to describe how the two sources of the pleasure of jokes, their techniques and their purposes, work together to
produce that pleasure. Here he and we are on shakier
ground than we have been in his two previous chapters.
The techniques are apparent in the jokes themselves,
though they may be variously described and classified.
The purposes served by jokes are also verifiable, though
with perhaps even more disagreement, through experience.
When we come to the mechanism by which pleasure is
produced and the process by which jokes are evolved,
we are in an area described by pure speculation. Here
we must judge theories, whether Freud's, Piaget's, or
Plessner's, according to which best fits and most nearly
unites the verifiable results.

Freud first takes up the question of the mechanism
of pleasure. He proposes that in the case of tendentious
jokes the yield of pleasure corresponds to the psychical
expenditure that is saved when an existing inhibition is
lifted or the erection of a new one is avoided (117-118).
I am in doubt as to the exact model of energy distribution
proposed here. Is it the inhibitory energy saved that is
released generating pleasure? Or is it the energy of the
more primary drive that would otherwise be dammed up that
generates pleasure in its satisfaction? Or are these two
indistinguishable in that all psychical energy comes from
one pot? At any rate I think we must agree that an
inhibition is necessary to create the kind of contrariety
in unity that Plessner describes as provoking the laughter of play and of the comic and wit. Inhibition creates the other half of the tension, whether we describe it as between assimilation and accommodation, between caprice and constraint, between self-assertion and adherence to a norm, or between aggression and inhibition, and thus distinguishes the pleasure of jokes from that of absorbed play or games with rules and from that of sexual intercourse or fighting.

**How Innocent Jokes Produce Pleasure**

Having noted that economy in expenditure on inhibition or suppression appears to be the secret of the pleasurable effect of tendentious jokes, Freud passes on to the question of the mechanism of pleasure in the case of innocent jokes. Since these jokes do not serve purposes other than their own pursuit of pleasure, the source of such pleasure as they produce must lie in their techniques. Here Freud divides the techniques discussed and classified earlier somewhat differently. This time there are three groups. The first group consists of the technique of play upon words, included under condensation before. The second group includes modification of familiar phrases, multiple use, similarity of sound, unification, allusions to quotations. The first three of these were included under condensation;
the fourth stood by itself; the last was included under indirect representation. The third group includes displacements, absurdity, faulty thinking, representation by the opposite, all of which originally stood alone except for representation by the opposite, which was included under indirect representation.

Here Freud aptly describes the technique of play upon words as focusing our attention on the word-presentation rather than on the thing-presentation, that is, on the sound of the word rather than on its meaning. Then, inexplicably or because he is looking for other kinds of economy of psychical expenditure, he explains the pleasure of play upon words as coming from the comparative ease of dealing with words rather than with their significances. But elsewhere he admits that joke-work, which presumably includes the work which produces innocent jokes as well as that which produces tendentious ones, takes psychical energy (149-150).

Thus, it seems to me more likely to regard this technique as a rebellion against the requirements of the serious use of language, an overcoming of an obstacle which, if it is not an inhibition because it may not be unconscious, is at least a counterpart, perhaps in the form of a conscious rule, of inhibition. Furthermore, as I indicated in Chapter 2's discussion of wit, such a
play upon words may provide additional compensation, in the form of showing off one's virtuoso handling of language, to offset the effort of the joke-work.

In the second group of technical methods Freud finds the common characteristic of rediscovery of the familiar and concludes directly that the pleasure occasioned is related to economy of psychical expenditure. Here again Freud depends on Groos's theory of play and even rejects as secondary that part of Groos's theory in which he comes closest to Piaget's theory—the joy in power. It seems to me that these techniques can be seen as linguistic practice play and that their production of pleasure can be explained in the same way as the pleasure of verbal comedy was explained in the preceding chapter. I argued there and I re-emphasize here that such play can be playing with the rules themselves. I would argue the same thing here, that these techniques produce pleasure by overcoming obstacles similar to inhibitions. The other argument Freud gives for the rediscovery of the familiar as the source of our pleasure-topicality—can also lend support to our alternate view that our pleasure arises from the overcoming of an obstacle. Jokes fade and die not only because the situation on which they comment fades from memory but also because the rules against which they rebel change.
In the third group of techniques of jokes Freud rightly emphasizes the pleasure in nonsense but he emphasizes the relief from the pressure of criticism and thus finds an economy in psychical expenditure rather than finding the source of pleasure in the act of rebellion that the production of nonsense represents. Again here, as in the case of play upon words, he aptly describes the process. He says that "the rebellion against the compulsion of logic and reality is deep-going and long-lasting" and finds its occurrence in the games of children (both with rules and imaginative), the Bierschwefel (ludicrous speech delivered at a beer party) of university students, and the Kneipzeitung (comic set of minutes, literally "tavern newspaper") of grown men who have been in attendance at a scientific conference. Perhaps Freud emphasizes economy rather than inhibition here because the mechanism by which the rebellion against inhibition takes place is not clearly indicated in this case (He refers to the state of childhood and the condition of intoxication to explain how the relief is brought about.); I labor under the same difficulty--I do not know what balances of psychical energy can produce this result--but the factor of inhibition seems a more significant link with other categories of jokes than that of economy.
The Evolution of Jokes

In the second half of this chapter Freud takes up the question of the psychogenesis of jokes, a question which goes more to the creation of jokes than to their appreciation, with which the first half of the chapter, on the mechanism of pleasure, dealt. Here he describes four stages in the evolution of jokes—play, jests (which must combat the demands of reason), innocent jokes (which fight with critical judgment), and tendentious jokes (which fight against suppression). Freud argues, again using Groos, that play gains pleasure through various techniques that make for economy of psychical expenditure. Jests, he says, safeguard their pleasure from criticism by giving their combinations a meaning. Innocent jokes safeguard theirs against stronger criticism by producing a meaning with value. Tendentious jokes join forces with inhibited purposes and their combined prospective pleasure is then enough to overcome the inhibition. In all these cases he traces the pleasure produced back to an economy in psychical expenditure. I would again like to argue the common notion of inhibition. If we consider play as Piaget presents it, its pleasure lies in its movement toward the pole of assimilation and resistance to the opposite pole of accommodation. In the case of jests we can see
its token presentation of meaning as not a defense but a degree of accommodation that makes the battle more challenging. Such is also the case with innocent jokes, though the game is made even more difficult. Finally, in the case of tendentious jokes, though it is easy to see how jokes serve other drives toward pleasure, it is less easy to see how those drives make the joke possible. At any rate the interrelationship is so intricate that it is impossible to say which is cause and which effect. I think we must be satisfied with the idea that jokes and inhibited purposes are intertwined. Freud ends this chapter with a footnote that contains his closest approach to the connection between play and jokes. "The twofold root of the pleasure in jokes--from playing with words and playing with thoughts, which corresponds to the very important distinction between verbal and conceptual jokes--makes it perceptibly more difficult to arrive at a concise formulation of general statements about jokes. . . . It can accordingly be said that the pleasure in jokes exhibits a core of original pleasure in play and a casing of pleasure in lifting inhibitions" (138n.). I believe that, could Freud have relied on Piaget rather than Groos for his conception of play, he would have seen more similarity than distinction and a greater unity
between core and casing. I am not, of course, arguing that play is the same as jokes, but Piaget's definition of it in terms of its orientation toward the pole of assimilation allows us to see a continuum from play to jokes as the emphasis on accommodation grows in proportion.

**Jokes and Laughter**

In "The Motives of Jokes--Jokes as a Social Process" (140-158), Freud again returns to the question of the effect of the joke on its audience. The most important point made concerns the connection of laughter with jokes. Using Herbert Spencer's definition from his essay "The Physiology of Laughter" (1860) that "laughter is a phenomenon of the discharge of mental excitation and a proof that the psychical employment of this excitation has suddenly come up against an obstacle" (146), Freud argues that it is necessary to tell a joke in order to confirm its success and complete the process of the development of pleasure by the laughing reaction of the hearer. Freud theorizes that much of the energy freed by the lifting of the inhibition is used or at least counterbalanced by the expenditure of energy on the joke-work. The hearer does not have to make this expenditure and consequently is able to discharge the freed energy in the form of laughter. This laughter may then infect the teller and make him laugh moderately,
too. I have some questions to raise here. First, I must say again that it is extremely difficult to be sure of these psychical energy transactions. And second, is it true that the teller cannot laugh until inspired by the hearer's laughter? I have seen tellers who could hardly tell their jokes for laughing. No doubt a straight face in the teller improves the joke for the hearer. And perhaps the teller's laughter is simply his remembered reaction upon hearing the joke which he is now merely retelling, not creating. But I wonder if the thrill of overcoming an inhibition is not enough by itself to excite the teller's laughter. I think we should leave this question open and consider as conclusive only the idea that in the hearer's laugh the teller is assured of his joke's success. Plessner's idea that laughter as a reaction to an objective situation gains by its being shared may account for this.

The Dreams-Play-Jokes Continuum

In "The Relation of Jokes to Dreams and to the Unconscious" (159-180), Freud returns to the question of how joke-work takes place in the maker of the joke. He first remakes the comparison of joke-work to dream-work and then sets up this hypothesis as to the way jokes are formed: "a preconscious thought is given over for a moment to unconscious revision and the outcome of this is at once grasped by conscious perception" (166). The
connection of tendentious jokes with the unconscious has already been sufficiently indicated in their combining with repressed urges. Freud offers the plausible suggestion that the unconscious can also help with the wording of innocent jokes, an idea that indirectly lends support to our argument that innocent jokes as well as tendentious jokes have obstacles to overcome. Freud's relation of the unconscious with childhood and this consequent remark, "The thought which, with the intention of constructing a joke, plunges into the unconscious is merely seeking there for the ancient dwelling-place of its former play with words," again evokes Piaget's idea of play. Indeed Piaget's modifications of Freud help us to see how play provides an intermediary between dreams and jokes and thus how the three form a smooth continuum just as do the unconscious, the preconscious, and the conscious.

In the preceding chapter we noted Piaget's objection to a topographical distinction between the conscious and the unconscious and his argument that unconscious symbolism can be seen as merely the extreme of assimilation. In this chapter of Freud's we note that he refers to the "topography of the mental apparatus" though he carefully adds that this is not to be taken anatomically (162). Two pages later he refers to a fourth achievement of
dream-work considered in The Interpretation of Dreams and Strachey's note suggests that "this is probably a reference to the inadequacy of a purely topographical account of mental processes." Still, his already-made distinction between tendentious and innocent jokes and his subsequent distinction between jokes and the comic are described in a metaphor that topographically separates the unconscious from the conscious. As for the dreams--play--jokes continuum that depends on the continuum between the unconscious and the conscious, Piaget begins his own explanation of the relationship of unconscious symbolism and affective schemas by noting that affective schemas like sensory-motor or intellectual schemas are basically unconscious in the sense that "'thought is an unconscious activity of the mind.'" He goes on to explain repression in terms of the functioning of these schemas. Compatible schemas combine wholly or in part. Where schemas are incompatible, one excludes another. Such an excluded schema is denied direct realization and consequently consciousness. It can only be supported by means of a symbolic substitute and thus remains unconscious. Given this explanation of repression, it is misleading to call such a symbolic substitution a "disguise" and it is unnecessary to hypothesize "censorship," as Freud does.
With Piaget's critique in mind I think we can see play as filling the gap between the dream's compromise by displacement and the joke's triumph over inhibition by duplicity in speech (172), between the dream's complete asociality and the joke's sociability, between the dream as wish-fulfillment and the joke as developed play, between the dream's connection with need and the joke's pleasure in mere activity, between the dream's avoidance of unpleasure and the joke's attainment of pleasure (179-180).

The Relation Between Jokes and the Comic

In Freud's last chapter, "Jokes and the Species of the Comic" (181-236) we come to the locus of my most important agreements and disagreements with him. The chapter seems to be organized on the basis of association, so we will begin not with the beginning but with what is acknowledged to be the true problem, the relation between jokes and the comic (203-208). In discussing the convergence of jokes and the comic, Freud contrasts two stories, one which appears to be merely a comic story but is really a joke and the other which appears to be a joke but is really just a comic story. The first story is similar to the first of the two Schadchen jokes quoted above. It appears to be a comic story because of the use of the comic technique
of unmasking but its purpose reveals it to be a joke.

Here is the second story:

'A. borrowed a copper kettle from B. and after he had returned it was sued by B. because the kettle now had a big hole in it which made it unusable. His defence was: "First, I never borrowed a kettle from B. at all; secondly, the kettle had a hole in it already when I got it from him; and thirdly, I gave him back the kettle undamaged."' (62)

This second story at first appears to be a joke because of the use of the joke technique of faulty reasoning but it remains a comic story because its pleasure arises from the saving of energy in thus giving free play to an unconscious mode of thought rather than having to establish a preconscious one and not from the lifting of any inhibition. Freud concludes from this comparison that "jokes and the comic are distinguished first and foremost in their psychical localization; the joke, it may be said, is the contribution made to the comic from the realm of the unconscious." I will subsequently argue that the comic of unmasking can be seen in terms of the overcoming of a type of inhibition. And I have already argued that such techniques as faulty reasoning produce their pleasure more by overcoming a type of inhibition than by simple economy of psychical energy. In fact, Freud's reclassification of this story from an innocent joke to a comic story raises doubts about the other jokes
he gives here as examples of jokes without a trace of the comic (They all seem to be innocent jokes.) and indeed about all the innocent jokes discussed earlier. Just as we found rebellion against inhibition in these pure-technique jokes, so I doubt the accuracy of Freud's final distinction between jokes and the comic, that between an economy in expenditure upon inhibition and an economy in expenditure upon ideation (upon cathexis) (236).

If these distinctions do not enable us to distinguish between jokes and the comic, how can we do so? I think the distinction I made in Chapter 1 between the witty and the comic will serve. The creator of the comedy is a wit; the person who expresses it is the comic character. Wit like jokes tends to be verbal, but neither need be and, as Freud notes, jokes are not merely the comic of speech (217). The creator and the expressor can be the same person, as again Freud notes (199). Often, however, the two are separate. There are at least two relations possible between the wit and the comic character. The wit may serve a hostile purpose by putting his comic character in a position to draw ridicule (189). But just as often he may allow him to express comedy that is itself rebellious; he may even allow the comic character to be witty as well.
Freud's example of the journalist Julius Stettenheim's creation of the character "Wippchen" illustrates this relationship well. Stettenheim combines the expressions "Money wie Heu [like hay]" and "Money wie Sand am Meere [like sand by the sea]" and has Wippchen speak of "Money wie Heu am Meere [like hay by the sea]" (212-213). I assume it is a similar process by which my husband as wit/comic-character comes to speak of me as "smart as a tack." But what about the comic that appears spontaneously as in, say, a very bad poem? Freud offers the plausible argument that such is comic if the discrepancy between the production and the standard by which it is to be judged is great enough (216-217). I would add that the person who conceives of this and laughs plays the part of the wit.

This discussion leads us quite naturally into a consideration of the naïve which Freud sees as standing between jokes and the comic (182-188). In this case the naïf, typically a child, lacking an inhibition, makes a remark which affects the hearer as a lifting of that inhibition. Freud sees such a naïve remark as akin to jokes in the economy of expenditure on inhibition and as akin to the comic in the comparison of the psychical energy it would have taken for the hearer to make the same remark and the lesser amount
that the naif required. I think we can see this situation as similar to the spontaneously created comic and its recognition.

The Comic as a Return to Play

The naif is usually a child. Later on in this chapter Freud suggests that a translation of the comic feeling might run: ""Those things are comic which are not proper for an adult'" (227). I would like to consider Freud's ideas on the comic organized as they are in the section that leads up to this suggestion (222-227), arguing myself throughout that the comparison of adult to child is better understood as a return to play in Piaget's sense and thus a kind of rebellion against the rules thus temporarily repudiated than it is as economy of psychical expenditure upon ideation. Though Freud discusses the various species of the comic--the comic of movement, of nonsense and stupidity, of situation, of expectation, of sexuality and obscenity--and what I believe we may call comic techniques--mimicry, caricature, parody and travesty, comparison--elsewhere in the chapter, here he arranges them in three groups. In the first group, Freud says, the comic difference is found by a comparison between another person, who appears as a child, and oneself. It includes the comic of movement and form, of mental functioning and
of character. In the second group the comic difference is to be found by a comparison entirely within the other person, who reduces himself to a child. This group includes the comic of situation, of exaggeration (caricature), of mimicry, of degradation, and of unmasking. In the third group Freud seeks the comic difference in a comparison entirely within oneself, who is discovered to contain a child. It includes the comic of expectation.

Freud finds in the comic of movement (189-194, 224-225) a comparison between the extravagant and inexpedient movements of the clown and the more economical and efficient movement the viewer would himself have made, a comparison perceived by a process Freud names ideational mimetics. Freud argues that the laughter of a child at a clown is not comic laughter but simply the laughter of superiority, which Freud notes bears no essential relation to comic pleasure (196). This may be the case with the child. His laughter may be a laughter of pure pleasure. The adult's laugh, or more likely smile, may also be the result of the above described comic comparison. But, as I have argued in the preceding chapter, both child and adult may be identifying with the clown as a kind of inept hero who can defy physical laws and escape the usual painful consequences. The clown may be for the adult successfully
inept emotionally and socially as well, as Charlie Chaplin illustrates. In his case and in that of other silent film comedians, the effort it has taken to produce such an impression of contrariety in unity may also be appreciated. Thus, we can see the clown as one who lifts physical, emotional, and social inhibitions for us.

In the comic of nonsense and stupidity (194-196, 225) Freud finds a similar but seemingly opposite comparison. Here the other person has not exerted enough energy on the cathexis. Freud explains this discrepancy by pointing to the reciprocal balance between muscular and intellectual work. As the latter increases, as it should in the development of the individual and of civilization, the former decreases. He points out that what is comic is invariably on the infantile side. Again I wish to add to this possibility, which is close to, though not identical with, the feeling of superiority, the alternative which I suggested in the preceding chapter that comic nonsense and its relatives present another defiance of rule. Again here, though there is relaxation into a simpler mode for the audience of verbal comedy, there is appreciable effort on the part of the creator. In the case of the pun, for instance, it is hard to tell whether our enjoyment goes up with the degree of outrage to sense or the degree of difficulty
taken on by the punster. These two factors would seem to be connected as Freud explains inhibition and joke-work to be.

In the comic of situation (196-197, 226) Freud finds a comparison between the cathetic expenditure of a person engaged in mental activity and that of the same person when he is interrupted by a pain or an excretory need, for instance. Freud comments that "the comic of situation is mostly based on embarrassments, in which we rediscover the child's helplessness. The worst of the embarrassments, the interference by the peremptory demands of natural needs with other functions, corresponds to the child's incomplete control over his bodily functions." But in the first formulation here we note that such a savings of cathetic expenditure may correspond to a kind of defiant relaxation. And since the interrupting natural function may be the sex drive, we see clear possibilities for the overcoming of inhibition here. With regard to the formulation of the child's situation we recall that Piaget emphasizes the child's pleasurable practice of sensory-motor skills which he has already mastered. Furthermore, we remember that such bodily functions are pleasurable in themselves. Here we must reconsider farce. In Chapter 1 we found farce to consist of a balanced contrast between
"an obvious clockwork arrangement of human events" and
"an outward aspect of probability." Though farce was
not discussed in Chapter 2, we can certainly see the
creator of farce as playing a game in which he opposes
to reality's demands for probability, assimilation's
invention of a clockwork arrangement of human events.
Perhaps we should now see the characters in such a
farce as comic victims whose only hope for salvation
from the confusion inflicted on them by this clockwork
arrangement is its final coalescence with realistic
probability. But in the case of The Importance of
Being Earnest we have found the characters sharing
their creator's wit in such a way that they both cause
and resolve their difficulties. Thus, I think we can
see in the comic of situation we call farce a defiance
of the demands of reality on the part of the playwright
and sometimes on the part of his characters.

Included in the same group with the comic of
situation is the comic of exaggeration (200-201, 226-227).
Freud associates it with caricature and describes that
technique as a means of degrading an exalted person or
object by isolating a single trait. Freud again uses
economy, the expenditure of the solemn restraint usually
adopted in the presence of the sublime spared here,
to explain our pleasure in caricature. But the word
degradation clearly implies that inhibition is overcome here. Freud explains children's exaggeration in terms of their lack of a sense of proportion, their ignorance of quantitative relations. Piaget emphasizes the other side of the coin, the child's assimilation of all things to himself and lack of accommodation of himself to the external world. This interpretation of the same facts supports my view that exaggeration is a form of rebellion against the requirements of imitation. In Chapter 1 I grouped folk humor along with farce as comedy of situation. In Chapter 2 I attempted to show how Constance Rourke's idea of such humor as the cornerstone of the American character suggests that the rebellious American "characters," the Yankee peddler, the backwoodsman, and the Negro slave, finding themselves in a playground that was threateningly real, chose as a defense a kind of super-play in which they made good use of their exaggerated lingo.

Freud explains the pleasure in mimicry in Bergsonian terms reinterpreted to show a relief of psychical expenditure. Our encounter with repetition in the living produces laughter by the degradation of the living into the inanimate. Instead of having to expend fresh energy to understand this second living thing, we are relieved of the necessity and our expected
expenditure can be discharged as laughter (208-209). In the case of children, Freud again emphasizes mimicry, wrongly if we accept Piaget, as the driving motive of most of their games (227). I wish to pick up a hint Freud gives us and emphasize that as a rule mimicry is permeated with caricature and thus involves degradation. It seems to me that all funny mimicry is basically caricature. Its faithfulness merely emphasizes the difficulties overcome by the effort and skill of the mimic. To this our reaction is a mixture of laughter and admiration. But pure mime such as that done by Marcel Marceau is a serious endeavor and arouses unmixed admiration.

Like caricature, parody and travesty achieve the degradation of something exalted. Only their method differs. They degrade "by destroying the unity that exists between people's characters as we know them and their speeches and actions, by replacing either the exalted figures or their utterances by inferior ones" (201). This explanation of disrupted unity does not differ materially from that I gave of the doubleness of parody and mock epic in Chapter 1, though I would add that these applications of high style to low subjects can also flatter both the original creator of the style and the subjects so treated, through a process perhaps not
unlike the effect of the admixture of pure mimicry to caricature. My argument in Chapter 2 that these literary devices offer the pleasure of playing with style is not contradicted but complemented by the degradation Freud suggests here. In his application of this idea to children Freud emphasizes how an adult's renunciation of his oppressive superiority and descending to the level of a child gives the child pure pleasure and the adult comic pleasure (227). I think we can see a lifting of inhibition uniting these two responses.

Comparison itself can offer another means of degradation. Freud's discussion of analogies that compare the abstract with the concrete brings to mind some of the degradations Bergson mentions—the moral into the physical, matter into manner, a person into a thing, the figurative into the literal. Here Freud emphasizes the relief of intellectual work such an analogy brings (209-211). I, of course, would want to emphasize the inhibition overcome by such a degradation.

Freud discusses the comic of expectation as a clearer example of the working of ideational mimetics than the comic of movement provided. Here he finds a comic difference between the expenditure, either physical or mental, we are prepared to make and the expenditure the disappointing object actually requires (197-199). Freud comments on the difficulty of finding
an infantile basis for the comic of expectation, noting that children tend to feel only disappointment (227). But his concluding sentence, "We might, however, take the child's power of blissful expectation and credulity as a basis for understanding how we appear to ourselves comic 'as a child' when we meet with a comic disappointment," strongly reminds me of the way in which Freud shows humor as working.

**Humor--the Triumph of the Pleasure Principle over the Reality Principle**

In fact Freud draws this comparison noting that in so far as humor saves energy by avoiding emotion it comes under the comic of expectation, but he immediately points to the difference that such dealing with emotion makes (235). In his short section on humor (228-235) he suggests that the pleasure of humor "arises from an economy in the expenditure of affect." This formulation seems to work well in the examples Freud gives from Mark Twain in which we are shifted away from pity, shrug off piety, and rise above anger. But I want to argue that such an economy of expenditure is less important than the conquest of emotion that makes it possible. Thus, I would wish to carry further the contrast that Freud made above between humor and the comic. One can, of course, see both jokes and the
comic contributing to humor. In the case of gallows humor, for instance, the condemned man achieves humor by making a joke. It is significant that Freud indicates that to make such a joke cost the rogue a great expenditure of psychical work. Thus, I argue that what humor shares with jokes is not economy of psychical expenditure but triumph over an obstacle. In the general case where the humorist defends himself against a distressing affect by comparing his present adult ego with his childish one perhaps we see this childish self as comic. Here Freud indicates significantly that humor's refusal "to withdraw the ideational content bearing the distressing affect from conscious attention as repression does" creates the necessity of "withdrawing the energy from the release of unpleasure that is already in preparation and of transforming it, by discharge, into pleasure." On this basis I argue that what humor shares with the comic is not economy in expenditure of psychical energy but triumph over an obstacle. I am ready to acknowledge that humor and the comic may be more preconscious and jokes more closely related to the unconscious. But innocent jokes also tend to be set in the preconscious. And as Piaget indicates the unconscious, preconscious, and conscious are better thought of as a continuum with differentiation according to function rather than as topographical locations.
In this book Freud speaks of humor as "one of the highest psychical achievements." In an essay on the subject written more than twenty years later he is even more complimentary. Here he says, "Like wit and the comic, humour has in it a *liberating* effect. But it has also something fine and elevating, which is lacking in the other two ways of deriving pleasure from intellectual activity." He does not abandon his formulation that humorous pleasure proceeds from a saving in expenditure of affect, but what he adds is an idea of how the process of the creation of humor takes place within the structure of the psyche, further described since the writing of the book. Its division into the id, the ego, and the super-ego enables Freud to see jokes as the contribution of the id to the comic while humor would be a contribution to the comic made through the agency of the super-ego. In the case of humor there is a displacement of large quantities of cathexis from the ego to the super-ego enabling it to act as a kindly parent and comfort the intimidated ego with an idea that could be expressed in the words "'Look here! This is all that this seemingly dangerous world amounts to. Child's play--the very thing to jest about!'" Despite his continued insistence upon economy, Freud describes humor in terms that must recall Piaget's theory of play. "Obviously what is fine about it is
the triumph of narcissism, the ego's victorious assertion of its own invulnerability." "Humour is not resigned; it is rebellious. It signifies the triumph not only of the ego, but also of the pleasure principle, which is strong enough to assert itself here in the face of the adverse real circumstances." It is easy to see this triumph of the pleasure principle over the reality principle in terms of assimilation resisting accommodation. Perhaps too, we can see the humorous response in terms of Plessner's contrast between crying and laughing. Perhaps humor resists the captivation by things through emotion that leads to crying and by turning the response over to the laughing body reasserts the self with its typically human eccentric position. At any rate we must certainly agree with Freud that the humorous attitude is "a rare and precious gift."

In Chapter 2 I tried to show how the self's dual role in humor can lead to the mixed effect of such examples of humor as that category I have called the humor of adolescence. In Chapter 1 I defined humor as the comic with the inclusion of the feelings. I thus emphasize this element in Freud's formulation while downplaying the idea of economy, suggesting instead a kind of triumph. I would thus modify Freud's summary statement, "The pleasure in jokes has seemed to us to arise from an economy in expenditure upon inhibition,
the pleasure in the comic from an economy in expenditure upon ideation (upon cathexis) and the pleasure in humour from an economy in expenditure upon feeling," by saying instead, "The pleasure in tendentious jokes seems to arise from a triumph over the inhibition of aggression, the pleasure in innocent jokes and the comic from a triumph over the demands of reason, and the pleasure in humor from a triumph over the impositions of reality."

**Shakespeare's Romantic Comedies**

Applying the idea of comedy as escape from repression to Shakespeare's romantic comedies explains their comic effect better than the application of other ideas has done. Northrop Frye has described such plays as *As You Like It* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as "green-world" comedies, in which young people, Rosalind and Orlando, Celia and Oliver; Hermia and Lysander, Helena and Demetrius, are opposed by older blocking figures representing an unjust order, Frederick, the usurping duke; Egeus, supported by the duke, Theseus. These young people escape to a pastoral "green world" in which metamorphoses occur leading to a final resolution in marriage and the institution of a new order.10 Sherman Hawkins adds a supplemental category called "closed-world" comedies, including such plays as *The Comedy of Errors* and *Twelfth Night.* According to
this alternate scenario there is unity of place and the young are in charge but there is a kind of sickness in this world and in the hearts of the lovers. Into it come invaders, Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse; Viola and Sebastian, who scramble the existing order, Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus, Adriana, and Luciana; Olivia and Orsino, into chaos and thus allow for a new, more acceptable equilibrium.11

As appealing as these formulations are in their orderliness, they are unsatisfactory to the extent that they fail to explain these plays as comedies. Both theorists succeed better in showing these plays as "romantic" than they do in showing them as "comic." I am dissatisfied with a concept of comedy in which we are expected to find satisfaction in a resolution that ends the comic escapade as marriage does both the "green-world" and the "closed-world" comedies. Indeed many of the marriages are in themselves unsatisfactory--Helena and Demetrius's, Olivia and Sebastian's, for examples. Such explanations tend to ignore the source of much of the laughter, the low comedy provided by the plebeian couples--Phebe and Silvius, Audrey and Touchstone; Flute's Thisby and Bottom's Pyramus; Nell and the Dromios; Maria and Sir Toby Belch. I do admit that these characters are found in subplots, but at that they occupy
significant portions of the plays and I think we may well suspect the attempt to locate the essence of a comedy in its plot with its emphasis on an ending. Much Ado About Nothing affords a kind of transition between these plays in which the main plots concern lovers and the subplots are filled with clowns and a play which reverses this situation. Besides the almost tragically serious love plot involving Hero and Claudio and the clowning of Dogberry, there is the subplot involving Beatrice and Benedick, a relationship which fits quite nicely between the other two in its tension between the bonds of love and the escape of wit, between accommodation and assimilation, if you will. The evidence shows this play to be much rewritten to increase this attractive subplot. Yet it is an earlier play that manifests the completion of this transition from a division of lovers and clowns with the former occupying the main plot and the latter filling a subplot, to a combination of the two in the main plot. This we get, of course, in The Taming of the Shrew. How comically satisfying it is to have the warring lovers, Kate and Petruchio, in the spotlight while the colorless Bianca and the inane Lucentio are shunted into the subplot from which they provide their romantic relief to the main comic show. Hawkins deals with this play as a mixed mode, indicating how Petruchio
can be seen as an invader of a "closed world" and how Kate's sojourn at Petruchio's country house is a movement into an inversion of the "green world" where Kate learns how to convert her world to her liking.

Though he deals with neither of these plays in which romance and comedy are truly united, the critic who best explains the relations between romance and comedy in Shakespeare's romantic comedies is C. L. Barber. His general discussion of "The Saturnalian Pattern in Shakespeare's Comedy" appeared first as an essay and then became the first chapter in his book *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and its Relation to Social Custom*, in which these ideas are applied to seven plays including *As You Like It* and *Henry IV*. In this general discussion he ties together many of the threads that have been developing in this study--doubleness, the ritual origin of comedy, and Freud's theory. The key words of his variant titles--festive and saturnalian--bring together the idea of ritual origin and the Freudian view of comedy which I have been developing in this chapter. The rejection of the opposite of saturnalian--satiric--also brings in my interpretation of comedy as play. Barber's thesis is a comparison of comedy with holiday. He notes that the audience has in a sense gone on holiday in coming
to a comedy. Thus, both in the audience and in the play itself the energy normally occupied in maintaining inhibition is freed for celebration. Barber concentrates on two holidays, the May game and the winter revel presided over by a Lord of Misrule. Both of these can be traced back to the fertility cycle the ritual celebration of which Cornford has shown to be basic to Attic comedy. One distinction Barber makes between the two holidays suggests other parallels to me. He points out that of the two basic gestures of nature worship that Cornford found in Aristophanes' comedies, one, invocation, predominates in the May game, while the other, abuse, is predominant in the customs centering on the Lord of Misrule. This suggests to me the festival typical of the spring, the May game, in which young couples went out to the woods to celebrate the renewal of fertility, may underlie the romantic part of these comedies, while the other, most typically held in the winter, in which roles were reversed, the servant became the master, and the individual's repressed impulses were vented, may underlie the really comic part. Furthermore, it is possible that the simpler form of the myth, that in which a young god overcomes and replaces an old one, as our New Year replaces the Old, may provide the basis of the plot Frye describes, in which a new
order of young people replaces the old order of their elders, while the more complicated form of the myth, that in which there is a dying god, a scapegoat figure, who rises again, as in Christianity, may provide a basis for the kind of comedy I have been describing in this study, in which a deviator from society's norm carries the frustrated self-assertions of his audience.\textsuperscript{13} Barber is careful to warn that "the use of analogies like the scapegoat rituals can be misleading, or merely amusing, if the pattern is not rigorously related to the imaginative process in the play," suggesting a criticism that can be made of formalist critics like Frye and psychoanalytic critics alike. He is careful to note that the analogy to a temporary king or scapegoat is ours, not Shakespeare's.\textsuperscript{14} But he also indicates that Shakespeare was in an ideal situation to transform holiday ritual into drama. The Renaissance was an age "when educated men were modifying a ceremonial conception of human life to create a historical conception.\textsuperscript{15} Shakespeare, having grown up in an agricultural area where saturnalian customs were kept up unselfconsciously and then moving to London where the Reformation had made people conscious of holidays and also contributed to the decline of their celebration, was able "to express both a countryman's participation in holiday and a
city man's consciousness of it. 16 Furthermore, his experience with the theater enabled him to combine its saturnalian tradition of clowning with that of holiday folly. 17 He was thus particularly apt to shift saturnalia from the symbolic action of holiday ritual to the symbolic action of the drama. 18 Barber finds it unfortunate that Shakespeare's gay plays have acquired the name "romantic comedies" as he points out that "they almost always establish a humorous perspective about the vein of hyperbole they borrow from Renaissance romances." This objection dissolves if we come to think of the two terms not as modifier and noun, but as in tension, as Barber shows them to be in the plays to which the phrase applies. He indicates how the clown's burlesque of actions seriously performed by their betters helps to clarify those actions.

Humor, Romance, and Reality in As You Like It

Barber takes Frye's most typical "green-world" comedy, As You Like It, and shows how one excess, its humor, modifies another excess, its romance, and brings about a realistic proportion of judgment and feeling. 19 He emphasizes that this humor is of a saturnalian, not a satiric nature. While the satirist presents reality and compares it with the ideal,
Shakespeare here presents the ideal and compares it with reality. Thus, while satire affirms man's possible perfection, such humor as we have here affirms man's certain imperfection. This saturnalian humor modifies the play's romance, both in the general sense of pastoral and in the particular sense of love.

The pastoral romance of the play can itself be seen in saturnalian terms as the contrast between everyday and holiday. This saturnalian excess is both pointed up and undermined by the two critics that accompany the two major enforested contingents--the Duke's attendant, Jaques, and the companion of Rosalind and Celia, formerly the fool in Frederick's court, Touchstone. Touchstone expresses as his own reaction the contradictory desire of these courtiers who have resorted to the pastoral life, the desire to have simultaneously the advantages of both court and country (III, ii). Similarly, Jaques's melancholy is a humor that criticizes the Duke's "usurpation" of the forest (II, i). Then we have Jaques's admiration of Touchstone as "a material fool" (II, vii; III, iii; V, iv) and his desire to be a fool. Barber sees this as Shakespeare's congratulating himself on the felicity of having made a fool into a clown.

Touchstone and Jaques are also used to comment on the excesses of romantic love. Touchstone makes the
general statement about the folly in love (II, iv). Both Touchstone and Jaques make fun of Orlando's verses (III, ii). But the humorous modification of the expression of romantic love centers on Rosalind and her love matches with Orlando. Barber points out how comic variations of love on either side of the love of this central couple enhance its reality by making it independent of illusions. On the one side there are the Petrarchan sentiments of Silvius and Phebe. These are undermined by Rosalind's own exaggerated downrightness (III, v). But lest the pendulum swing too far away from sentiment, there is Touchstone's affair with Audrey which reduces love to its lowest common denominator, sex without sentiment. Rosalind's own expression of love indirectly through exaggerated conventional language combines the balancing excesses. Thus, as Barber says, "To emphasize by humor the limitations of the experience has become a way of asserting its reality."

Henry IV as Examination of Misrule and Rule

In his discussion of As You Like It Barber shows how holiday licensed romance but also set a limit to that excess by balancing it with the excess of humor. His discussion of Henry IV presents it as not only a dramatization of holiday but also an examination of the need for holiday and of the need to limit holiday."
Falstaff, as mock king to Hal as real king, provides Hal not only with opportunity for saturnalian escape but also with the consciousness that comes from playing a role. Barber sees Hal as being at his best when at the end of Part One he straddles the prostrate bodies of Hotspur and Falstaff and acknowledges the importance in the larger scheme of things of the contributions of both, the honor of Hotspur and the complementary joie de vivre of Falstaff. But Falstaff's comic resurrection creates a new problem for the Hal who in Part Two becomes King Henry V. Barber's explanation as to why Hal's rejection of Falstaff is so unsatisfactory is a convincing one. Barber readily acknowledges that Falstaff must be rejected as a court favorite, but as disappointing as the inevitable end of the reign of Misrule always is, it is not on this score that Hal's rejection is unsatisfactory. It is rather that he also rejects him as a mode of awareness. Barber says, "Hal's lines, redefining his holiday with Falstaff as a dream, and then despising the dream, seek to invalidate that holiday pole of life, instead of including it, as his lines on his old acquaintance did at the end of Part One. (Elsewhere in Shakespeare, to dismiss dreams categorically is foolhardy.)" But Barber argues further that this mistake is made on the dramatist's level as well as on
the characters'. He sees Shakespeare as acceding to Hal's attempt to rid himself of actual evil in the physical person of Falstaff. Whereas, Hal retreats from his understanding that acting out unconscious motives in saturnalia helps bring them into the sphere of conscious control by relating them to the whole of experience, Shakespeare retreats from his use of ritual ironically transformed into drama and instead uses it magically here. In doing so he falls into the production of sentimental "drama." Barber comments, "Sentimental 'drama,' that which succeeds in being neither comedy nor tragedy, can be regarded from this vantage as theater used as a substitute for ritual, without the commitment to participation and discipline proper to ritual nor the commitment to the fullest understanding proper to comedy or tragedy."

Comedy and Satire

The handling by Barber of the necessary limits of saturnalia leads us again to the question of satire. I had hoped to be able at this point to distinguish between comedy and satire on the basis of their general subjects. I planned to say that while comedy focused on the individual in his deviation from the norm, satire concentrated on institutions and represented them as malformed norms. But we have seen in Freud's Schadchen
jokes, for instance, how individuals can at one and the same time both represent an institution and rebel against it. And works that are clearly satirical, Sinclair Lewis' *Elmer Gantry*, for example, seem not to attack an institution so much as to expose its perverted practitioners.

Then I sought a kind of formal distinction. I set up all the possible combinations of deviator and norm—a situation in which both deviator and norm are basically good, a situation in which the deviator is bad while the norm is good, a situation where the deviator is good and the norm bad, and a situation where the deviator is bad and the norm is also bad. I found to my disappointment that I could place comedies in every category. In *Tristram Shandy* both the eccentric Uncle Toby and his society seem sound enough. The folks in *Bartholomew Fair* seem both tolerant and tolerable. While Molière's Tartuffe and Jonson's Alchemist differ in degree of badness and thus in their fates, both seem bad deviators in fairly good societies. Alceste in *The Misanthrope*, Red McMurphy in *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and Bluntschli in *Arms and the Man*, again differing in their fates, here because of the degree of oppressiveness of their societies, all seem better than the norm they oppose. And finally Jonson's Volpone and Melville's Confidence-Man seem to be bad characters in a bad world.
Then I reflected that not only can I put comedies in all of these categories, but also all of these "comedies" with the probable exception of *Tristram Shandy* can be and have been called satires.

Then I thought I would try audience identification. I would look for satiric ridicule in contrast with comic sympathy. Perhaps satire differed from comedy in actually directing ridicule at a character, as I had argued was not the case in comedy. Here I seized on an example that did just this. Wayne Booth satirizes *Max Rafferty on Education* by pretending to think that the book under review is itself a satire:

> This is one of the most effective satires ever written. The Anonymous author--I would give anything to know who he is--has invented, in the guise of an essay collection, a wildly comic portrait of a hero who carries upon his frail shoulders the burden of every absurd educational pose known to man. The author (I shall from this point on call him "X") has created in "Max Rafferty" a character sure to endure in our pantheon, a self-betraying narrator as egotistical as Sir Willoughby Patterne, as prosaic and utilitarian as Gradgrind, as authoritarian as Squeers, as fond of his own voice as Micawber.21

After this start it becomes a simple matter for Booth to contrast Max Rafferty's words with a sound norm merely by arranging quotations under various categories of faults. I am quite sure that all my laughter is directed at Max Rafferty here. But in the case of Malvolio, while I would agree with Barber at first that
he is treated satirically, that is with ridicule, this "serious ass" provides us so much pleasure that I am not sure that I do not finally come to laugh with him. Irvin Ehrenpreis offers a description of the reader's response to Swift's satire that further complicates the distinction between satire and comedy on the basis of audience identification. After noting that Satan himself took the first of all comic roles, he indicates how Swift, rather than standing back from the evil he is scourging, plunges right into it. Indicating how Swift in his pamphlet Letter of Thanks from My Lord Wharton to the Lord Bishop of St. Asaph assumes the identity of one comically evil character in order to satirize the political writings of another, Ehrenpreis comments, "The contemplation of pure evil in a human shape released Swift's imagination till he could slip inside the diabolical nature and taste its sensations." Swift's own involvement then necessitates in the reader a reaction combining horror at the evil and enjoyment of the comedy and thus produces a feeling of guilt. Similarly, the situation in Gulliver's Fourth Voyage when Gulliver both identifies himself with and is revolted by the Yahoos traps the laughing reader between sympathetic humor and punitive ridicule, for to accept the Yahoos is to accept the most sickening bestiality, but to reject them is to reject oneself.
I finally came to the reluctant conclusion that the judging of a work as comic or satiric was more strongly influenced by the audience than by the work itself. In his essay "The Satirist and Society" R. C. Elliott first traces the development of the poet out of the magician, a development that parallels the development we have traced of art out of ritual. Elliott then indicates that remnants of original fear of the poet-magician hang on in society's reaction to the satirist. Further, he compares this development to Freud's description of the development of wit out of inventive and inventive out of fighting. Such a weapon, too, arouses fear in the audience. Thus, though the satirist claims to be attacking only the perversions of an institution, this attack may seem to the society to function by the magical process of synecdoche to eat away at the institution itself.24 Those insecure in the power of inhibition to withstand aggressive drives may fear even the temporary lifting of inhibition that wit causes. Thus, in a very repressive society both satire and comedy may be prohibited; in a moderately repressive society comedy may be called satire; in a fairly secure society satire may be taken as comedy; while in a licentious society it may not be possible to create either satire or comedy because of the lack of needed opposition.
Barber gives us a nice example of how similar productions can be taken quite differently in different situations. He notes that before the Reformation the Catholic Church could tolerate as comedy a burlesque of the Mass in the feast of fools. He also notes that, when Elizabeth had just taken the throne, she sanctioned a masque which consisted of a masquerade of crows, asses, and wolves as cardinals, bishops, and abbots. It was a revolutionary moment and satire could serve it. Yet in 1564, when she had just established a precarious religious settlement, she was outraged by a burlesque of the Mass. Such festive revolutions seemed dangerous at this moment.\(^{25}\)

The foregoing implies that satire lies between comedy and revolution, an idea suggested by the distinction in Chapter 2 between comedy and satire on the basis of purpose. Barber's use of Burke's phrase "symbolic action" also helps to make this kind of distinction. Comedy is \textit{symbolic} action; satire is \textit{symbolic} action; revolution is, of course, action itself. One clear distinction we can make between comedy (\textit{symbolic action}) and satire (\textit{symbolic action}) is that satire brings in real people. Barber again gives us a good example of how the incorporation of real people into festive games can change their effect from comic to satiric and their consequences from toleration to
punishment. It seems that in 1601 a young man named Talboys Dymoke and some of his cronies represented the person of his notorious kinsman, the Earl of Lincoln, in their summer games of misrule. In doing so they converted their saturnalia into a slanderous satire and subjected themselves to the ruinous fines handed down by the Star Chamber in 1610. Of course, real people may be thinly disguised in a satire and real people may provide the models for comic characters, but it is in keeping with the didactic purpose of satire that real people be recognizable within it.

Freud's theory of jokes, the comic, and humor has enabled us to determine the rebelliousness of comedy, a rebelliousness that begins in play but must have obstacles to rebel against, obstacles provided, as we have seen, by various kinds of inhibition, both unconscious and conscious. It has enabled us to describe satisfactorily how Shakespeare's romantic comedy works. And it has brought us to the question of how to distinguish between comedy and satire and enabled us at least to suggest how a division, perhaps a sliding one, can be made between them. There remains, however, the question of how comedy differs from tragedy, especially in our modern age where neither comedy nor tragedy confronts standards by which to judge the success of its effect. I will take up this question in my final chapter.
CHAPTER 4

COMEDY AS AFFIRMATION

At the end of the preceding chapter I suggested that comedy in its rebelliousness resembles tragedy and thus the need arises to distinguish them. In the past it has been thought only too easy to make this distinction and categorical divisions have been propounded which certainly failed to pay comedy its due and probably also limited tragedy arbitrarily. The theorist who makes the most basic distinction and to my mind the fairest is Susanne K. Langer. In her *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art* she defines what she calls "the comic rhythm" and distinguishes it from "the tragic rhythm."¹ The pure sense of life is the underlying feeling of comedy and dictates its rhythmically structured unity, its organic form. Tragedy's basic feeling is of life punctuated by death and its rhythmically structured unity, its organic form, is one that moves toward this end. Langer provides an analogy that helps us understand the difference between the two underlying rhythms. The one-celled organism is in a sense immortal since any product of its multiple divisions could, barring accidents,
sustain its existence. The multi-celled forms of life, however, are fated from their beginning to an end in death and decay, their only "immortal" portion being the sex cells which they contribute toward the development of new individuals. On this analogy comedy is associated with life as a process, tragedy with life as a career; comedy confronts Fortune, tragedy faces Fate; the form of comedy is continuous, that of tragedy is closed.

Langer's Description of Comedy--

Confirmation of Ideas

Langer supports this basic distinction between comedy and tragedy with description of comedy that in many cases ties in with the characteristics of comedy I have been developing in this study. While she makes the point that comedy's vitality may in the development of the art take many forms and be expressed through many plots, Langer does connect comedy with ritual that celebrates the perpetual rebirth, eternal life, seen in the fertility myth. She approaches a description of its doubleness or contrariety in unity by pointing out that "it is at once religious and ribald, knowing and defiant, social and freakishly individual" (331). Her characterization of the clown as "the personified élan vital" (342) is in keeping with our view of him as the hero of play. "It is in the nature of comedy to be
erotic, risqué, and sensuous if not sensual, impious, and even wicked" (349). This statement suggests the Freudian interpretation of comedy as escape from repression. In support of this connection there are her comments on the aggressiveness of comic action; on the puppet Punch as a representative of people's repressed desires for general vengeance, revolt, and destruction; and on the intertwining of the sex impulse with the life impulse. Finally, many of Langer's statements support the idea of comedy that I would like to develop in this chapter—that comedy is the affirmation of the self in the face of demands for accommodation and in the face of meaninglessness. This strain is evident in her description of the clown as Life, the Will, and the Brain; in her recognition of gallows humor as a flash of self-assertion; in her description of Punch as "all motion, whim, and impulse--the 'libido' itself" (343); and in her presentation of sex in terms of self-preservation and self-assertion.

**Comedy and Laughter**

As supportive as Langer's conception of the comic rhythm is to my theory, I must object that it is overly inclusive. Her concept includes as comedy heroic drama, romantic drama, and political drama, in other words, any drama characterized by temporal success. I would argue
that a funny play differs in an important way from the
general category of plays that end happily. Langer
concedes that the serious products of comic art are
rarer than its humorous products. But she goes on to
indicate that laughter is a larger category than humor.
This I acknowledge in my use of Plessner, with his
discussion of joy, titillation, embarrassment, and
despair as occasions of laughter along with play and
the comic and wit. As Plessner finds play the first
occasion of true laughter and the comic and wit as
occasioning laughter in its full development, so Langer
admits that humor has its true home in comic drama and
that laughter springs from the very structure of comedy.
But now it is my turn to object that Langer's conception
of humorous laughter is overly broad. In saying that
laughter seems to arise from a surge of vital feeling,
she tends to broaden her conception of laughter again
to see it as a reaction to almost any increase in
pleasure. Plessner is again helpful in distinguishing
the laughter which is part of the expression of joy
from laughter as the appropriate response to the comic.
As a funny play differs from the general category of
plays with happy endings, so does humor differ from
pleasure in general. We can find common ground in the
overlap between the sphere of comedy as conceived by
Langer and the sphere of laughter. The more exact cause of the laughter in this shared area is the comic character's deviation from a norm.

**A Trivialization of Comedy?**

In her failure to examine the difference between humorous and serious comedy Langer seems to ally her theory with that of Albert Cook who insists in *The Dark Voyage and the Golden Mean: A Philosophy of Comedy* that comedy emphasizes the society while tragedy emphasizes the individual. Indeed her analogy to one-celled and multi-celled organisms would seem to associate comedy with the colony or the society and tragedy with the individual. In the preceding chapters I have been at pains to show that comedy, like tragedy, has to do with conflict between the individual and society. Langer's reduction of the comic hero's opponent from death as Fate to death as Chance also serves to trivialize the conflict in comedy. But perhaps I am misjudging Langer's theory here. Perhaps there is a basic decision between the tragic rhythm and the comic rhythm which Langer assumes before she goes on to describe their differences. Early in her chapter Langer characterizes man's thought as "a brainy opportunism in face of an essentially dreadful universe" (331). It is this ability that enables a human being to foresee
a future fraught with the dangers of Fortune and ending with the Fate of death. The writer of comedy is no less aware of the fatal end than is the writer of tragedy, but, we may assume, he chooses to present a sense of life which acts as if there were no such finality. If we assume that Langer also acknowledges this prior decision, we may satisfy our desire to have comedy recognized as as fully significant as tragedy and still accept her statements that "in comedy . . . there is a general trivialization of the human battle" and "there is no permanent defeat and permanent human triumph except in tragedy" (349). We may see this trivialization as the kind in which humor triumphs over suffering by a supreme act of assimilation, and we may see the continuous nature of comedy as a perpetual rejection of the final accommodation that is death.

Modern Literature and the Blending of Comedy and Tragedy

Although Langer's theory clearly differentiates comedy and tragedy, she herself acknowledges that their difference is not one of opposites and that the two are capable of various combinations. Since such combination is typical of most modern literature, I would like to consider Karl S. Guthke's very clear exposition of the blending of comedy and tragedy in modern tragi-comedy
and its affiliates. Guthke sees the philosophical basis of modern tragicomedy as Existentialism. This may suggest that such literature is basically comic in the sense George Santayana uses when he asserts that "everything in nature is lyrical in its ideal essence, tragic in its fate, and comic in its existence." Guthke emphasizes the total blending of comedy and tragedy. I would like to argue that we find the balance tipped either toward tragedy in a work's nihilism or toward comedy in a work's affirmation.

Guthke first considers the grounds on which classical dramatic theory distinguished between tragedy and comedy—rank of characters, style, subject matter, ending—and promptly indicates how classical practice violated the criteria set up on these grounds. He then goes on to point out how these criteria were more honored in the breach than in the observance in later European dramaturgy, the medieval mystery plays and the plays of Shakespeare providing the most familiar examples. Guthke particularly notes the seventeenth-century European tragicomedy, including some of the heroic plays called comedy by Langer, which were tragedies with happy endings. He comments on their resemblance to romantic comedy and melodrama and wonders how, once the convention was established, the audience could take
seriously the potentially tragic action that preceded the happy dénouement. And he also pays special attention to the sixteenth-century pastoral tragicomedy practiced and defended by Giambattista Guarini. This type of tragicomedy, rather than incorporating the extremes of tragedy and comedy, provided a middle ground between the two, foreshadowing in so doing the sentimental comedy of the eighteenth century.

Having thus handled the historical background of tragicomedy, Guthke then turns to current theory. Here he again lays out criteria that have been proposed to distinguish between tragedy and comedy—

1) Tragedy engages the feelings, while comedy appeals to the intellect.

2) The tragic is a quality inherent in life or the human condition and thus is something objective, while the comic is invariably a matter of subjective perception which makes something comical by a particular way of viewing it.

3) The world of tragedy is open to transcendence, while the world of comedy is limited to the realm of immanence.

In regard to the first criterion, we have already seen in this study that the most inclusive category of comedy, humor, addresses the feelings as well as the intellect.
Guthke adds the argument that the irony of a tragedy like *Oedipus Rex*, while perhaps an intellectually comic device, also has the effect of deepening the tragic feeling. I might add that the hero's tragic flaw, which in many tragedies contributes to this sense of irony, is itself the kind of thing we would expect to find in a comic character. In regard to the second of these proposed distinguishing criteria, while I can see the association of tragedy with accommodation and comedy with assimilation in this suggestion, I am swayed by Guthke's arguments that the comic may also be a matter of objective reality and that a subjective choice of perception underlies tragedy as well as comedy. In regard to the third criterion, Guthke points to the replacement of the idea of transcendental fate by the purely human and social causes of tragedy, heredity and environment. And his pointing to the development of "metaphysical farce" can be supported by Freudian ideas developed above, the classes of jokes he calls cynical and skeptical.

Having thus indicated the possibility of tragicomedy in the blurring of these supposed antitheses between tragedy and comedy, Guthke goes on to point out that such antitheses also point to the similarity shared by the two extremes. He then proposes the following premise, very gratifying to me: "Conflict is the nerve of every drama, comic or tragic. The comic "hero" as
well as the tragic "hero" is in conflict with his world, with some kind of order of his world which is the accepted norm within the confines of the play" (51-52). This premise forms the basis for Guthke's theory of tragicomedy.

Before leaving this discussion of the theory of tragicomedy, Guthke makes some distinctions between it and related phenomena which are of use to us. Melodrama is not tragicomic because its component elements are neither truly comic nor truly tragic in the first place. Satire differs from tragicomedy in that the satirist knows the norm and ideal from which reality is separated; the tragicomic writer lacks any such surety. Humor differs from tragicomedy in that the humorist has a knowing tolerance while the tragicomedian lacks any such ultimate reassurance. (I could argue for a more radical kind of humor, but it would then be a shading of tragicomedy toward its comic side, and certainly the more secure humor also exists and should be differentiated.) Guthke sees the grotesque as the aesthetic manifestation of the philosophical idea the absurd. The grotesque shares with tragicomedy its disorientation. But while the grotesque fuses ludicrousness and horror to produce an impression of uncanniness, tragicomedy operates more logically and more realistically. It occurs to me that we may see
the relationship of the grotesque to tragicomedy as similar to that of wit to the comic. The grotesque may make a statement about the absurdity of the world; tragicomedy then portrays what it is like to live in such a world.

In his final chapter Guthke discusses the philosophical basis of tragicomedy, which is Existentialism. He points out that as both traditional tragedy and traditional comedy presuppose a normative order, both have disappeared in our modern age with its lack of faith in any absolutes. Then he proposes that this double loss might, paradoxically, result in a singular gain in that the hybrid genre tragicomedy is capable of reawakening both tragic and comic responses. It does so not by assuming answers as did traditional comedy and tragedy but by asking questions. Guthke describes the modern philosophical situation and tragicomedy's response to it this way:

In the face of the ever threatening possibility of total meaninglessness, the modern writer turns to the almost preposterous endeavor to reflect and realize the world in his work of art, to grasp the ungraspable by making it the subject of his intuition and of his craft. Thus, he does not objectify meaninglessness as is frequently supposed (by partisans of fashionable meaninglessness and their opponents alike). Rather, he challenges what appears to be meaningless, to give an answer to that questioning, to which his writing ultimately amounts. He is, therefore, not the extreme pessimist whom he occasionally fancies himself to be. Instead—mindful perhaps of the
common-place observation that the complete pessimist would, in the first place, no longer write any more--he takes up the challenge presented by the threat of meaningfulness. (117-118)

Thus the tragicomedian is like Camus' Absurd Man. He recognizes his desire to comprehend the world and he acknowledges the impossibility of doing so. Rather than canceling either side of this absurd dilemma he maintains the tension by continuing to question while assuming no answers. Another alternative is to deny the impossibility of knowing and become an idealist. This, I suggest, is the choice forming the basis of traditional comedy and tragedy. His third alternative is to deny the desire to know and commit suicide. Guthke defends tragicomedy from the charge that it is nihilistic in this way. But I believe we sometimes find that at the end of the process of writing an author rests in a kind of despair that borders on such nihilism, that borders on the suicide of no longer writing. At other times such a process of writing and questioning can convey a sense of affirmation of the self and of life. Thus I wonder if we might not designate this kind of tragicomedy as "epistemological comedy" to emphasize its opposite leaning from tragicomedy bordering on nihilism. Guthke says, "Human life today is absurd because it is essentially unintelligible, leading the
inquiring spirit to a strange 'wonder' which is at the root of artistic creation" (125). Donald M. Kartiganer, in his study of modern literary form, says almost the same thing: "Final truth may be only the commitment to truth and the accompanying realization of the incompleteness of every vision possible, but such an incompleteness is the very source of imagination itself." 

Accepting Guthke's description of modern tragicomedy as typical of most modern literature but using Langer's distinction between tragedy and comedy to determine the basic leaning of such mixed works, I would now like to argue that certain modern literary works can rightfully be called comic in that they make at least a minimal affirmation.

**Black Humor**

The term "black humor" has been used for literary works which regard the absurd world with a humorous attitude. While I have no objection to this term, it seems to have led at least one critic into a misunderstanding of such works that my term "epistemological comedy" might have avoided. Burton Feldman "anatomizes" black humor and in doing so he complains that black humorists spend learning rather than earning it; he decries the detachment of black humor and wants the commitment of its philosophical
background, Existentialism; he prefers the novel that is a moral agent as well as a realistic image. He has, of course, failed to dissect out the element of comedy, comedy which is by nature detached from the "serious" world, comedy which must play with something and so, in an essentially unknowable world, seizes on academic produce for play toys.

Feldman, in his short article, mentions few titles, but by supplying titles for the authors he lists we may wonder at the inclusion of some of these under the genre black humor. John Barth's The Sot-Weed Factor is clearly a parody—of an eighteenth-century novel, like Tom Jones, with a bit of Candide added. Terry Southern's The Magic Christian seems a fairly straightforward example of satire. J. P. Donleavy's The Ginger Man can be classified as a picaresque novel. It seems that these are categorized as black humor only because they touch on the absurd world, The Sot-Weed Factor in being such a disillusioning parody, The Magic Christian in being so thoroughgoing a satire, The Ginger Man in presenting such an unredeemable rogue.

Others of Feldman's examples I would certainly admit to the category black humor, but I would submit they might better be understood if they were described as "epistemological comedy." These books, in the absence
of any realizable epistemological system, play with epistemological products, here with fiction. These games played with fictional form may remind us of the humorist novelist's playing with the form of the novel and producing *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. Indeed these epistemological comedians owe much to their predecessor, Laurence Sterne. But there is an important difference. Sterne played his games with the confidence that man is the measure of all things; these novelists play theirs with the fear that this is so.⁶ Feldman omits Vladimir Nabokov but surely his *Lolita* belongs to the category of black humor or epistemological comedy. Laced with puns, parodies, and puzzles, so many that one annotator has supplied 121 pages of notes for its 315 pages of text,⁷ *Lolita* constantly reminds us that it is a fiction, but it is still to a degree a realistic fiction and its irony never completely undercuts Humbert Humbert's love for Lolita. Thomas Pynchon's *V.* carries this process farther and its fictitious structure, the detective-story pursuit of *V.*, predominates so over the realistic materials out of which it is made that its making, a joint effort of author and reader, finally leaves those materials behind. And one wonders in how many ways the clues may be combined. Though I gathered by the tracing of the carved ivory comb, the clock-irised
glass eye, and the navel star sapphire that Stencil's mother, Victoria Wren, Vera Meroving, Veronica Manganese, the V. who loved Mélanie, and the Bad Priest were all one and the same, I still wonder about the place names—the V-Note bar, the mythical Vheissu, and Valletta. The process of playing with fiction culminates in Barth's series of short stories, *Lost in the Funhouse*. Looking for the thread on which this series is strung, we might first seize on the character Ambrose who appears in three of the stories, "Ambrose His Mark," "Water-Message," and "Lost in the Funhouse." By associating Ambrose with the author of these stories, we might add to this incipient idea of unity the stories "Autobiography," "Title," "Life-Story," and "Anonymiad," and possibly by a fine stretching of the imagination "Night-Sea Journey" and "Petition." But left outside this Ambrose/author focus are "Frame-Tale," "Echo," "Two Meditations," "Glossolalia," and "Menelaiad." What then does hold these stories or these groups of stories together? The idea of fiction as a game. All the stories in the series can be seen as greater or lesser illustrations of this idea. "Lost in the Funhouse" comments on a character's place in fiction. "Life-Story" involves the author and the reader in the same dilemma. "Autobiography: A Self-Recorded Fiction" has a story telling itself, or
rather attempting to. "Night-Sea Journey" also offers an unusual narrator. "Anonymiad" comments most directly on "Menelaiad," which plays with the convention of stories within stories. "Frame-Tale" provides us with a Moebius strip in which to wrap the whole book; it reads, "Once upon a time there was a story that began."

"Glossolalia," with its six metrical imitations of the Lord's Prayer, may be taken as yet another "gloss" on the book as a whole.

I have said that the process of playing with fiction culminates in Lost in the Funhouse, but Samuel Beckett's novels may be seen as extending even this limit. Though they can also be seen as playing with literary convention, Molloy, Malone Dies, and The Unnamable deal with much sparser material. The three form a descending trilogy. In Molloy, Jacques Moran tries to comprehend the narrator, Molloy, but like him, deteriorates in experience. In Malone Dies, Malone's invention Saposcat-Macmann and his life, both games, merge. In The Unnamable, the unnamed narrator speaks of his self-images--Molloy, Moran, Malone, Mahood, Worm, Murphy, Mercier, Watt--until finally nothing is left but the unnamed's sense of guilt and his voice, which seem to be on the verge of extinction.

Compared with the wealth of material played with in Lolita, V., and Lost in the Funhouse, the meagerness of Beckett's
material produces a nihilistic feeling in me, but, as Guthke points out, continued questioning belies complete pessimism. Perhaps, then, I should see in this questioning Beckett's taking the position of the Absurd Man and thus making a kind of affirmation, though an excruciatingly minimal one.

These works of Nabokov, Pynchon, Barth, and Beckett find their comedy mainly in their form. Another black humorist Feldman includes in his criticism is Joseph Heller, whose Catch-22 was discussed in Chapter 1. Catch-22's humorous absurdity consists mainly in its content, the world faced by Heller's point-of-view character, Yossarian. A work which Feldman partially exempts from his criticism, Herman Melville's The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade, also posits humorous absurdity in the world it presents, though its central character and its narrator produce additional complexities.

The Confidence-Man as Existential

Melville's Confidence-Man has been interpreted on the metaphysical level as the Devil and as God and on the human level as Everyman and as Hero. Such extremes suggest at once that here we have the kind of mixed mode that Guthke described in his book on tragicomedy. A similar controversy has raged as to the philosophical view behind this book's creation. Speculation has
ranged from complete nihilism to a philosophy of the Golden Mean. These extremes suggest to me that Leon F. Seltzer is right in seeing the Melvillian philosophy behind *The Confidence-Man* as Existential.⁸ Those who view the book as a satire find it a failed one since it lacks a corrective norm and since it goes devastatingly far, subjecting to its attack not only social institutions and individual folly but also human nature itself. I believe our discussion so far in this study justifies our associating satire with needed social security, comedy with also necessary individual freedom, and Existential works with the absolute freedom of meaninglessness. Seltzer suggests that this book is an Existential comedy when he says, "It is, in fact, Melville's complete lucidity as to the impossibility of reaching true knowledge that enables him at last to handle what might have been a distressing, even frightening, scene in such a manner that he may pass through the realm of pathos and despair to that of consummate irony and ingenious situational comedy."⁹

**In Contrast to Pierre**

In *The Confidence-Man* we find a sense of detachment which Melville could not achieve in *Pierre: Or, the Ambiguities*. In the earlier book there is no embodied narrator, and many of the book's problems are the result
of an indeterminate range of distance between the implied author and Pierre. As Charles Feidelson, Jr., explains it the nihilism of the writer in the book becomes the nihilistic loss of faith in his symbol in the writer of the book, and the results include both the puzzling self-satire of the book and its unsatisfactory melodrama. Melville's acceptance of his symbols as merely posited meaning led to his production of the comic counterpart of Pierre, The Confidence-Man, but it also led to his almost-thirty-year retirement from the art of fiction. Though there is still no embodied narrator in the later book and though critics have varied in their interpretations as to how to take the implied author, I think we can see him as yet another confidence man who is both similar to and detached from his creation the Confidence-Man.

The Con-Man as Picaresque Rogue

But now let us look at some of the more specific comic devices in this Existential comedy, many of which devices it shares with earlier, more securely based comedy. The first half of the book seems to share the humor of the picaresque novel. It is this half of the book that offers the most evidence to those who regard the Confidence-Man as the Devil. We find ourselves siding with him, nevertheless, because no one likes to place himself among the dupes, and anyway this whole
world is no better than it should be. The time, the place, and the other characters are all perfectly set up for our picaresque rogue. It is April Fools' Day. We are aboard a ship which gives the appearance of a "whitewashed fort on a floating isle" and is ironically named the *Fidèle*. Our companions, called by a cynical one among us a "flock of fools, under this captain of fools, in this ship of fools!" (21), are at any rate as varied as Chaucer's Canterbury pilgrims (15) or perhaps as the participants in Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* and are all being carried down the Mississippi River "in one cosmopolitan and confident tide" (15).

The Con-Man as American "Character"

We can see in our anti-hero's guises evidence of his American ancestry. The Yankee peddler is seen in his manifestation as John Truman, president and transfer-agent of the Black Rapids Coal Company, and there is a little of this character in our rogue's guises as the representative of the Seminole Widow and Orphan Asylum and the Philosophical Intelligence Office man. The Negro is represented by the manifestation of Black Guinea, though he may be only a minstrel black. Constance Rourke's third main American humorous character, the backwoodsman, is also present in our story, though as an adversary of our hero rather than as one of his
manifestations. Nathalia Wright has pointed to a literary predecessor of the manifestation of our Confidence-Man that dominates the second half of the book, the cosmopolitan, in the character Steadfast Dodge in James Fenimore Cooper's *Homeward Bound*.¹² Both Dodge and the cosmopolitan seem, in their eclectic costume, to be wearing Europe.

**A Real-Life Con-Man**

But there was a more recent, actual predecessor of Melville's Confidence-Man, from whom he probably got the name.¹³ The arrest of a man named Thompson was reported in the *New York Herald*, July 8, 1849. His basic con-game—pretending to know his victim and then asking, "Have you confidence in me to trust me with your watch until tomorrow?"—was remarkably successful, and his story attracted wide interest in the days that followed. The *Herald* published three days later a satire indicating the extent to which "legal" confidence men dominated the society. William E. Burton and John Brougham, always on top of the times it seems, managed to produce a topical farce on the event opening July 23. The *National Police Gazette* on August 4 in an article entitled "Corruption of Authority: The Confidence Man and the District Attorney" conveyed the idea that there were confidence men even among those who pursued
confidence men. A mellower mood prevailed in a Merchants' Ledger article, quoted approvingly in Literary World, which was owned by Melville's friends the Duyckincks, on August 18. It suggested that such a confidence man's success indicated an admirable trust among members of the society. Not only can the actual dialogue Thompson used be found in Melville's book, so can all the attitudes these reactions convey—the pervasiveness, the humor, the insidiousness, the good of such con-games.

**The Reader as Detective**

Our delight in the escapades of such a picaresque rogue and in being on the side of the duper, not the duped, has added to it the delight of piecing together his various disguises and discovering in all of them our same Confidence-Man, a sort of detective-story-addict's delight, similar to that we take in Pynchon's V. We follow our Con-Man through a series of color changes—white to black to white and black to gray to ruddy to snuff-colored to colorless and finally to all colors. We are immediately alerted to the situation when the appearance of "a man in cream-colors, at the water-side in the city of St. Louis" is juxtaposed with "a placard nigh the captain's office, offering a reward for the capture of a mysterious imposter, supposed to have
recently arrived from the East" (9). We note how this "lamb-like figure" (12) with his flaxen hair topped by a white fur hat "with a long fleecy nap" (9) is transposed into a "black sheep" (17) with "knotted black fleece" (16) on his head. We check carefully the list given by this same Black Guinea of those men who will vouch for him.

"Oh yes, oh yes, dar is aboard here a werry nice, good ge'mman wid a weed, and a ge'mman in a gray coat and white tie, what knows all about me; and a ge'mman wid a big book, too; and a yarb-doctor; and a ge'mman in a yaller west; and a ge'mman wid a brass plate; and a ge'mman in a wiolet robe; and a ge'mman as is a sodjer; and ever so many good, kind, honest ge'mmen more abord what knows me and will speak for me, God bress 'em; yes, and what knows me as well as dis poor old darkie knows hisself, God bress him!" (19)

We do not miss the connection provided by Mr. Roberts' business card, which Black Guinea retrieves (23-24) and John Ringman has knowledge of, saying, "'Are you not, sir, Henry Roberts, forwarding merchant, of Wheeling, Pennsylvania? Pray, now, if you use the advertisement of business cards, and happen to have one with you, just look at it, and see whether you are not the man I take you for'" (25). We, knowing our history of slang, catch the changes our Confidence-Man rings on his name (26), including Ringman, Truman, the herb doctor's self-given nickname "the Happy Man," Goodman, and even Guinea.16

We put together Ringman's telling Roberts about John Truman and his Black Rapids Coal Company (29):
the man in gray, representative for the Seminole charity, his indicating to the young Episcopal clergyman that he had assisted Black Guinea ashore (36)—and also his seeming to forget this "fact" for a minute shortly thereafter (39)—and we are sure that the donation for Guinea given in trust to this man in gray will reach him (41); also Truman's asking the collegian if he had seen Ringman leave the ship (53); Truman's recommending the herb-doctor to the old miser (80); the doctor's failing to catch the disembarking Truman for the miser (109); the PIO man's answering Pitch that he had seen a man in a snuff-colored surtout (the herb-doctor) going ashore at Cape Giradeau as he himself came aboard (121); and the cosmopolitan's "eaves-dropping" on Pitch's conversation with the PIO man (141).

We note, too, how, as the author tells us, a changed expression can almost create the impression of a new man: "What started this was, to account, if necessary, for the changed air of the man with the weed, who, throwing off in private the cold garb of decorum, and so giving warmly loose to his genuine heart, seemed almost transformed into another being" (32). And we understand the similarity the author sees between the man in gray and the man with the weed (35). We wonder if we have seen before the "somewhat elderly person, in the quaker dress" who passes out copies of
an ode decrying distrust (58-59). We notice the similarity between the man procuring water for the old miser and the doctor prescribing herbs for the sick man (79-80, 86-88). And the groveling canine manner of the Philosophical Intelligence Office man (120) bears a marked resemblance to the dog-like appearance of Black Guinea (16). We, too, like Pitch, may say of the PIO man, "for an unaccountable pair, you and the herb-doctor ought to yoke together" (123). And we may apply Pitch's argument, "Was the caterpillar one creature, and is the butterfly another? The butterfly is the caterpillar in a gaudy cloak; stripped of which, there lies the impostor's long spindle of a body, pretty much worm-shaped as before" (132), to the PIO man and his metamorphosis, the cosmopolitan. Finally, we may see a similarity between the cosmopolitan's kindly leading the old man to his berth (260) and the herb-doctor's doing the same for the miser (118).

**Puns**

A simpler comic device running throughout the book, sometimes merely on the surface and sometimes with deeper resonances, is puns and similar jokes. Of course, the pun on **confidence** is basic and pervasive. There are also such delights as the conceited sophomore decrying "sophomorean errors" and thereby showing himself
as very sophomoric (57). Goneril might be pronounced "some kind of toad" but no one would "have accused her of being a toady" (66-67)—a "punishing" understatement. The Missouri bachelor tells us, "'My name is Pitch; I stick to what I say'" (124). Some take "the Devil's Joke," "a grotesquely-shaped bluff" (136), as a synecdoche for this whole book. At Cairo we learn of people named Fever and Ague, Yellow Jack, and Don Saturninus Typhus (136). There is Charlie Noble's toast to the press, "'Not the black press but the red'" (175). Frank Goodman says, "'To be frank, . . . .'" (179) and finally tells Chalie Noble, "'. . . by your whole character you impel me to throw myself upon your nobleness'" (187). There is Orchis, the shoemaker, "one whose calling it is to defend the understandings of men from naked contact with the substance of things" (214). The cosmopolitan chides the barber, "'But the taking of mankind by the nose is; a habit, barber, which I sadly fear has insensibly bred in you a disrespect for man'" (233-234). Then we learn that the barber's name is William Cream (242). When the cosmopolitan and the old man have concluded that the warning "'Believe not his many words—an enemy speaketh sweetly with his lips,'" from the "'Wisdom of Jesus, the Son of Sirach,'" is from the Apocrypha, the distorting echo from a berth
says, perhaps more accurately, "'What's that about the Apocalypse?'" (249-251). As the cosmopolitan is helping the old man find on his bankbill the goose his Counterfeit Detector described, he answers the question, "'Is it a real goose?'" with "'A perfect goose; beautiful goose,'" and when the old man still does not get it, he says, "'Don't you see what a wild-goose chase it has led you?'" (257).

The Author's Jokes

Something akin to these puns are ironies directed by the author at the reader. The reader might think to broaden Pitch's protest to the PIO man to cover the Confidence-Man in all his manifestations and perhaps the author as well: "'Yes, you pun with ideas as another man may with words'" (131). Such ironies include John Truman's metaphor to the effect that whoever had the true light of faith should stick behind the secure "Malakoff of confidence" and not be tempted out to hazardous skirmishes on the open ground of reason (72). Malakoff was a fort, thought impregnable, until it fell in 1855. A possible in-joke between the author and the reader is found in the cosmopolitan's suggestion to Pitch, who resembles Melville in several ways, that he go to London and put up at the Piazza, a reminder of Melville's Piazza Tales published in 1856.
Another such joke is to be found in the possible veiled allusion to the first chapter of Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* in "They look that fancy shall evoke scenes different from those of the same old crowd round the custom-house counter" (190). Then there is the joke of having the cosmopolitan interrupt the account of Indian-hating with "'One moment, . . . and let me refill my calumet!'" (159). We certainly get the message when Frank Goodman says to Charlie Noble, "'Indeed, . . . our sentiments agree so, that were they written in a book, whose was whose, few but the nicest critics might determine" (166). And we catch Charlie's ironic tautology "'If truth don't speak through the people, it never speaks at all; so I heard one say'" (171). And, of course, the cosmopolitan's answer to the operator's question as to the truth of the story of Charlemont, "'Of course not; it is a story which I told with the purpose of every story-teller--to amuse'" (193), undermines not only this interpolated story but the one surrounding it. In the book's last scene we get several lines that may well be messages straight from the author to the reader. They include the berth-speaker's comment on the "good news" of the Bible, "'Too good to be true!'" (249); the same person's comment on the apocryphal warning ending "'When thou hearest these things, awake in thy sleep'": "'Who's
that describing the confidence man?" (250); and finally the ironic ambiguity in the cosmopolitan's comment "'I have indifferent eyes'" (260).

**The Narrator as Con-Man**

The narrator constantly keeps the reader slightly off balance with his con-games, thus reminding us, perhaps, of *Tristram Shandy*. But certainly in the chapters where the narrator addresses the reader, he more nearly resembles the narrator of *Tom Jones*, however with an important difference. Fielding succeeds in ingratiating himself with the reader. Melville, in chapters with titles such as "Worth the consideration of those to whom it may prove worth considering," "Which may pass for whatever it may prove to be worth," and "In which the last three words of the last chapter are made the text of the discourse, which will be sure of receiving more or less attention from those readers who do not skip it," gives almost the opposite impression, as if he were encouraging the reader not to like him. Certainly the reader learns not to trust him. For instance, in Chapter 14 he argues that it is impossible for a writer to present a consistent character and still be realistic, as people in real life are inconsistent. In Chapter 33 he argues against an attempt at portraying real life as readers want novelty, romance, and just in case we have
not noticed the contradiction, he reminds us of his earlier point. Then in Chapter 44 he turns around again and says that novelty, at least the novelty of an original character, is nearly impossible to achieve. I have taken these chapters out of their contexts, but when I put them back in, we find even more contradictions. Chapter 14 introduces its topic with the statement "To some it may raise a degree of surprise that one so full of confidence, as the merchant has throughout shown himself, up to the moment of his late sudden impulsiveness, would, in that instance, have betrayed such a depth of discontent" (74-75). But, in fact, the merchant, before that supposedly inconsistent, discontented moment, had been arguing for natural evil in one individual and unmerited misery in another. Chapter 44 denies the truth of a description of one character that has just been put in the mouth of another. Certainly it is a small step "to pass," as Chapter 14 says in closing, "from the comedy of thought to the comedy of action" (77), and we do so, as Chapter 44 admits, in an atmosphere made "smoky" (247) by such an "illuminating" chapter.

**The Con-Man Becomes Confidence-Man**

On such slippery ground as this one hates to make any unequivocal statements, but I am going to venture
the idea that we can see a development in our Confidence-Man in his later manifestations, that we can regard the latter half of the book as a kind of shaky Bildungsroman with an ambiguous or, more likely, negative result. It is this half of the book, along with the even more problematical deaf-mute avatar at the beginning, that critics emphasizing the God-like aspects of the Confidence-Man lean more heavily upon. Certainly there is a shift in the satirical aspect of the book. Whereas, in the first half the Confidence-Man evoked various philosophical positions in his victims by plumping for them himself; in the latter half he confronts them as brought to him by real advocates, Noble, Winsome and Egbert, the barber, the old man and the boy. I see the cosmopolitan as testing out philanthropic views, only to be disappointed time after time. What has brought about this "'last ditch humanism'"\textsuperscript{18} is, I believe, his encounters with Pitch.

**Pitch as Melville's Spokesman**

In the first encounter we see Pitch offering the same objections to the herb-doctor's Pollyanna-ish statements about "'Nature, the universal mother'" (116) that Melville made to Emerson's. Pitch completely defeats this manifestation of our Confidence-Man and even directs toward him an accusation that also seems
Melvillian, "'You, the moderate man, may be used for wrong, but are useless for right'" (119). In the second encounter he directs another accusation at this new manifestation of the Confidence-Man, the Philosophical Intelligence Office man, saying, "'Free, eh? You a freeman, you flatter yourself? With those coat-tails and that spinal complaint of servility? Free? Just cast up in your private mind who is your master, will you?'" (121). He again reminds us of Melville when he uses a sailor's imagery to attack the PIO man's naivete' (126) and when he gives the devil his due, saying, "'To judge by the event, he appears to have understood man better even than the Being who made him'" (129).

But when the Confidence-Man sees in Pitch not a complete cynic but a Diogenes,19 saying, "'Ah, sir, permit me--when I behold you on this mild summer's eve, thus eccentrically clothed in the skins of wild beasts, I cannot but conclude that the equally grim and unsuitable habit of your mind is likewise but an eccentric assumption, having no basis in your genuine soul, no more than in nature herself'" (133), Pitch caves in and newly awakened confidence in, or at least hope of, an honest boy temporarily obscures the PIO man's untrustworthiness. After a short interlude in which, "like one beginning to rouse himself from a dose of
chloroform treacherously given, he half divines, too, that he, the philosopher, had unwittingly been betrayed into being an unphilosophical dupe" (137), Pitch is met by the Confidence-Man's final avatar, the cosmopolitan. In their encounter Pitch accuses him of being "'Diogenes masquerading as a cosmopolitan'" (146). Though the cosmopolitan denies this, saying that Diogenes was on the negative side of misanthropy, the positive aspect of Diogenes' search seems to be planted in this "genial misanthrope" and it is working to convert him into at least a "surly philanthropist" like Pitch.

The Cosmopolitan Confronts Con-Men

Having defended to Pitch the philosophy under which he has been operating, "'Life is a pic-nic en costume; one must take a part, assume a character, stand ready in a sensible way to play the fool'" (141), the Confidence-Man is able to examine it in the almost mirror image of himself found in the operator Charlie Noble. In this encounter he tests the idea that "'a good laugher cannot be a bad man,'" and Charlie's accommodating burst of laughter at a pauper-boy who is both pitiable and ludicrous (171) may very well force the Confidence-Man to recognize the truth in the statement he made to Pitch, "'Something Satanic about irony. God defend me from Irony, and Satire, his
bosom friend" (144). There may be some sincerity in his meditation on Autolycus. He questions,

"How is one to take Autolycus? A rogue so happy, so lucky, so triumphant, of so almost captivatingly vicious a career that a virtuous man reduced to the poorhouse (were such a contingency conceivable), might almost long to change sides with him. And yet, see the words put into his mouth: 'Oh,' cries Autolycus, as he comes galloping, gay as a buck, upon the stage, 'oh, he laughs, 'oh what a fool is Honesty, and Trust, his sworn brother, a very simple gentleman.'" (180)

The cosmopolitan consoles himself with the thought that Autolycus is only a fictional creature (180). Then he questions again: "'True, in Autolycus there is humor; but though, according to my principle, humor is in general to be held a saving quality, yet the case of Autolycus is an exception, because it is his humor which, so to speak, oils his mischievousness'" (181).

In his next encounter, with Winsome and Egbert, in the discussion of the beauty and joy of being a rattle-snake (which, along with the discussion of Winsome's Essay on Friendship with its distinction between celestial and terrestrial friends, provides the evidence that Emerson and, in so far as he put Emerson's ideas into practice, Thoreau are being attacked here), the Confidence-Man seems really to muse on the proposition "'If I were a rattle-snake'" (196). Certainly Winsome's "sublime egotism" and Egbert's
use of the China Aster story bring him to the point where he protests against the philosophy they represent as both impractical and immoral, saying, "'And moonshiny as it in theory may be, yet a very practical philosophy it turns out in effect'" (231). And in his scornfully throwing down a shilling for Egbert to buy fuel "'to warm the frozen natures'" of himself and Winsome by, I can see him throwing off more than one fictitious character.

It is after this grand gesture that we see our cosmopolitan pull the only con in the book's second half--his finagling a free shave from the barber. If the idea that the cosmopolitan is hoping really to convert the "No-Trust" William Cream is extremely shaky, one will have to admit at least the equally shaky possibility that he may really intend to pay for the shave, and one has the definite, if minimal, evidence that the cosmopolitan does check the Bible for the barber's Son of Sirach quote.

**The Confidence-Man Disillusioned**

In the final scene we have the cosmopolitan's encounter with the old, seemingly blessed man who assures him that the cynical words of the Son of Sirach are apocryphal. Then after saying to the cosmopolitan, "'From what you say, I see you are something of my way of thinking--you think that to distrust the creature, is a kind of distrusting of the Creator'" (251), the
old man turns right around and buys from a boy a traveler's patent lock, a money-belt, and a Counterfeit Detector. Though James E. Miller, Jr., sees this boy as an assistant to the Confidence-Man,21 I think H. Bruce Franklin makes an important point when he says he "is also the last avatar of the Confidence-Man's antagonist, the No Trust Man."22 Certainly the irony is not lost on the cosmopolitan, who reminds the old man that what he had been saying was "'you hoped you did not distrust the creature, for that would imply distrust of the Creator'" (255). Then, when, after speaking of "'trusting in that Power which is alike able and willing to protect us when we cannot ourselves'" (258), the old man begins searching for a life-preserver, the cosmopolitan offers him a chamber stool for one and, having been, as Philip Drew comments, disillusioned,23 he answers the old man's "'Goodnight; and Providence have both of us in its good keeping,'" with "'Be sure it will, sir, since in Providence, as in man, you and I equally put trust'" (260).

Thus, Melville takes us through several stages in the development of his central character, each with its characteristic kind of humor. In the first half of the book we have the picaresque rogue, the Con-Man, the "genial misanthrope" who confronts a fraudulent world
by playing the game of fraud. Here the humor is that of deviating from a bad norm by exaggerating it, the humor of fraud and trickery. This is backed by the humor of disguise, as the Con-Man is backed by the joking and elusive narrator. In the second half of the book we have a Diogenes figure, a man searching not so much for honesty as for trust, the Confidence-Man or the man trying for confidence, the "surly philanthropist." Here the humor is of the purely affirmative kind, an attempt to affirm human nature. This attempt is met by the unsympathetic laughter of Charlie Noble, the fraudulent philosophy of Winsome and Egbert, the "No-Trust" barber. But this attempt to affirm human nature is not totally defeated until the cosmopolitan meets the old man, who equates trust in man with trust in God and then undermines both by buying protection from fraud from the boy. This leaves the Confidence-Man in the position of the Absurd Man. Having tried both cynicism and optimism, he will now be able only to endure.24 We have then at the book's end only the minimal affirmation of Existential questioning.

As I Lay Dying as Existential

The diversity of critical opinion of Melville's Confidence-Man is matched by the range of interpretation of Faulkner's As I Lay Dying. The main action, the week-long funeral journey of Addie Bundren during which
the putrifying body is saved from flood and fire, is obviously grotesque. But the rhetoric involving concepts of words and deeds, time and space indicates a deeper meaning. Most critics initially mention the novel's "amusing," "humorous," "comic," "hilarious," "farcical," "ridiculous," "ironic," "ludicrous," "grotesque," "hysterical," "gothic," or, best, "absurd" aspect and then go on to discuss its tragic or at least more serious side, though some limit themselves to pointing out examples of humor in the book, relating them to, for instance, the folk humor of the Old Southwest or Dickens' humor. I would like to rectify this critical imbalance by pointing to pervasive humor in the book and to indicate that the book itself should be seen as balanced between tragedy and comedy, an example of the mixed mode Guthke called the grotesque-absurd, with perhaps a slight tilt toward the comic side. The critic that I have found to come closest to expressing this idea about *As I Lay Dying* is Edmond L. Volpe.²⁵ Also very suggestive are Robert M. Slabey in an article on "*As I Lay Dying* as an Existential Novel"²⁶ and Barbara M. Cross's article entitled "Apocalypse and Comedy in *As I Lay Dying*."²⁷

**In Contrast to The Sound and the Fury**

As in *The Confidence-Man* there is in *As I Lay Dying* the problem of determining the tone of the narration.
Here the problem is even more basic than in *The Confidence-Man* because there are no author-narrated sections. Rather there are fifty-nine sections narrated by fifteen characters who are involved in the action in varying degrees. I suggest that it is this very complexity that gives this book the kind of detachment that enables us to see it as an Existential comedy. Faulkner has given us all these conflicting and even contradictory points of view to keep us from settling comfortably on any one view and in fact to show that all these views may be equally true—or equally false. I submit that this very omission of an author-narrated section like the "Dilsey" section of *The Sound and the Fury* makes *As I Lay Dying* more balanced, less inclined toward nihilism, than the work that immediately preceded it. Though many see the last section of *The Sound and the Fury* as a hopeful balance to the desperate failure seen in the first three sections, I agree with Kartiganer that the communion offered by orthodox religion is irrelevant to the Compsons. Seen in this way the author-narrated last section is even more devastating than the three foregoing sections narrated by the Compson brothers.

**Folk Humor**

Before discussing the ways in which the Bundren-family narrators can be measured against the Absurd Man, let us
look at the humorous elements in the book. Dewey Dell, Jewel, and Cash can all be seen as major figures in folk tales of their own. The "treatment" Dewey Dell gets from MacGowan, the drugstore clerk, was one of the main things that made me question the seriousness of *As I Lay Dying*. Otis B. Wheeler says this "smacks of Southwestern humor," and Cleanth Brooks pins it down more specifically when he says it is "comedy in the tradition of the medieval fabliau." I can see the line-up of characters as not so unlike that of "The Miller's Tale," with Dewey Dell as Alisoun, MacGowan as Nicholas, and the druggist as the heavy, John. There is even an interfering Absolon in the soda jerk, Jody, whom MacGowan handles thusly: "'Excuse me a minute,' I says. I go around the prescription case. 'Did you hear about that fellow sprained his ear?' I says. 'After that he couldn't even hear a belch.'"

Darl's account of Jewel's "sleepy summer" the year he was fifteen contains a lot of folk humor. Darl recounts that "once I found him asleep at the cow, the bucket in place and half full and his hands up to the wrists in the milk and his head against the cow's flank" (122); and that "I have seen him go to sleep chopping; watched the hoe going slower and slower up and down, with less and less of an arc, until it
stopped and he leaning on it motionless in the hot shimmer of the sun" (123); and even that "he ate hearty enough, except for his way of going to sleep in his plate, with a piece of bread halfway to his mouth and his jaws still chewing" (123). Cash and Darl's speculations as to Jewel's nocturnal activities have the earthy realism of folk humor.

"Rutting," Cash said. . . . Give him time to realise that it'll save, that there'll be just as much more tomorrow, and he'll be all right. . . ."

. . .

After that I thought it was right comical: he acting so bewildered and willing and dead for sleep and gaunt as a bean-pole, and thinking he was so smart with it. And I wondered who the girl was. I thought of all I knew that it might be, but I couldn't say for sure.

"'Taint any girl," Cash said. "It's a married woman somewhere. Aint any young girl got that much daring and staying power. . . ."

. . . "She's sure a stayer," I told Cash. "I used to admire her, but I downright respect her now." (124 & 126)

The truth of the matter has a folksy humor in its revelation.

Then we saw him. He came up along the ditch and then turned straight across the field, riding the horse. Its mane and tail were going, as though in motion they were carrying out the splotchy pattern of its coat: he looked like he was riding on a big pinwheel, barebacked, with a rope bridle, and no hat on his head. It was a descendant of those Texas ponies Flem Snopes brought here twenty-five years ago and auctioned off for two dollars a head and nobody but old Lon Quick ever caught his and still owned some of the blood because he could never give it away. (127)
We have already seen, in Chapter 1, an example of Cash's frontiersman-like stoicism in the endurance of pain. The accompanying Spartan-like discipline is seen in Cash's qualified exactness in replying to the question of how far he fell the first time he broke his leg: "'Twenty-eight foot, four and a half inches, about,' Cash says" (85). And related is his workman's pleasure in listing his reasons for making the coffin "on the bevel," these comprising the whole of his first chapter.

**Cora as a "Humorist"**

Not unrelated to these folk tale characters are other comic characters in the book, Anse Bundren, Cora Tull, and the Reverend Whitfield, but these, I think, may be seen as more closely related to the comedy of humors (Anse and Cora) and the comedy of manners (Whitfield). I have already discussed the humor of Anse in Chapter 2. There I indicated that he is an example of gross assimilation. Here I might call his total self-involvement grotesque. Cora Tull is at least the second funniest character in the book. Her "humor," that of sanctimonious busybody-ness, is best seen in this droll comment by her husband--and victim: "I reckon she's right. I reckon if there's ere a man or woman anywhere that He could turn it all over to and go away with His mind at rest, it would be Cora. And I reckon she would
make a few changes, no matter how He was running it. And I reckon they would be for man's good. Leastways, we would have to like them. Leastways, we might as well go on and make like we did" (70).

But her abilities at minding other people's business are seriously undermined by her misjudgments. She makes more mistakes than anyone else in the book. Cora's most ironic misjudgment, concerning Addie's "salvation," casts the most doubt on her own. She says, "One day we were talking. She had never been pure religious, not even after that summer at the camp meeting when Brother Whitfield wrestled with her spirit, singled her out and strove with the vanity in her mortal heart, and I said to her many a time . . . and I said "Who are you, to say what it sin and what is not sin?" (158-159).

Cora, of course, is perfectly ignorant of the fact that Brother Whitfield wrestled with more than the spirit of Addie Bundren. Thus we can see that Addie's version of this conversation is much more insightful: "One day I was talking to Cora. She prayed for me because she believed I was blind to sin, wanting me to kneel and pray too, because people to whom sin is just a matter of words, to them salvation is just words too" (168).

Whitfield's Comedy of Manners

Pale by comparison with Anse or even Cora is another hypocrite who should be mentioned if only
because his hypocrisy belongs to a different comedy from theirs. His belongs to the comedy of manners in that he represents a flaw in the social fabric. He is, of course, the Reverend Whitfield, the book's minor Dimmesdale. His hypocrisy is not terribly important to the book as a whole, though it does contrast ironically with his Hester's emphasis on deeds rather than words. His partner in "sanctified sin" substitutes "will for the deed," and the deed itself was to be merely "words" anyway, the words of his confession. His "prayer" is thrown in mostly for our amusement, for it seems the "deed" would have done no good, though probably also no harm.

I have sinned, O Lord. Thou knowest the extent of my remorse and the will of my spirit. But He is merciful: He will accept the will for the deed, Who knew that when I framed the words of my confession it was to Anse I spoke them, even though he was not there. It was He in His infinite wisdom that restrained the tale from her dying lips as she lay surrounded by those who loved and trusted her; mine the travail by water which I sustained by the strength of His hand. Praise to Thee in Thy bounteous and omnipotent love; O praise. (171)

The Elemental Nature of As I Lay Dying

Faulkner described his initial conception of the book in this way: "'I simply imagined a group of people and subjected them to the simple universal natural catastrophes which are flood and fire with a simple natural motive to give direction to their progress.'"32 It is this elemental basis of the work that I think is
responsible for its mixed comic and tragic effect. We have the physical world, the world of flood and fire, a world, if not actively hostile to man, at best indifferent. Cross points out that this world is seen, by Darl at any rate, in apocalyptic terms. On the day Addie Bundren dies, "The sun, an hour above the horizon, is poised like a bloody egg upon a crest of thunderheads; the light has turned copper: in the eye portentous, in the nose sulphurous, smelling of lightning" (39). And when the family, with their corrupting burden, faces the flooded river, it is "as though we had reached the place where the motion of the wasted world accelerates just before the final precipice" (139). The journey the family make through this physical world is also a basic one. It is a journey to bury the dead, but it ends in a marriage as well as a funeral, and there is new life, though its fate is still undecided, aboard. The human relationships here are also elemental--those of kinship--and they show all the ambiguity that such basic relationships can show. This elemental world, this elemental action, and these elemental human relationships form a situation that can be seen in Existential terms. But in the absence of author narration we must look to the character-narrators to find if any one or any combination of them achieves the vision of Camus' Absurd Man.
Anse—"Too Inert for Thought"

Let us begin with Anse, most of whose "thoughts" have been dealt with already. Anse seems to deny a meaningless world without ever considering whether it has meaning or not. If he can be said to believe in anything, it is Providence. He thinks, "I am not religious, I reckon. But peace is my heart; I know it is. I have done things but neither better nor worse than them that pretend otherlike, and I know that Old Marster will care for me as for ere a sparrow that falls" (37). And the furthest his "questioning" goes is this: "I am the chosen of the Lord, for who He loveth, so doeth He chastiseth. But I be durn if He dont take some curious ways to show it, seems like" (105). Addie sees him as a creature ruled by words and thus gets her revenge on him through his exacted promise to bury her in Jefferson. But Anse seems to me even less than that. His words are without meaning even when, as rarely, his actions match them. It seems to me the most apt description of Anse is that he represents "a wisdom too profound or too inert for even thought." His is a merely animal--or even vegetable--existence.

Jewel—Violent Action

Jewel's general inarticulateness and the fact that we have just one short monologue from him make it
difficult to analyze even his motives and certainly his philosophy in facing the world. We can speculate that Darl is right in seeing Jewel's horse as a substitute for his mother, especially since Darl is acute enough to sense that Jewel is a bastard and that thus his only link to the family is to his mother. The love-hate relationship between Jewel and his mother, who is thus forced to favor him, can be believed even though its description comes to us through the unloved and jealous Darl, and it is echoed in Jewel's relationship to his horse. Perhaps the most human actions by Jewel are his saving his mother's corpse from both flood and fire and, even more, giving up his horse to make burial according to her demand possible. But his reactions are for the most part inarticulate, violent, and negative. Even his relationship with his mother seems more a joint hatred of the others than a shared love, as can be seen in his imagining himself dying with her in this way: "It would just be me and her on a high hill and me rolling the rocks down the hill at their faces, picking them up and throwing them down the hill faces and teeth and all by God until she was quiet . . ." (15). Finally it seems Darl is right in thinking that "Jewel knows he is, because he does not know that he does not know whether he is or not" (76). This makes Jewel something like a violent Anse, philosophically.
Dewey Dell--a Germinating Seed

Dewey Dell is hardly more conscious. She does recognize the distinction between her own identity and Dr. Peabody's; as she says, "He is his guts and I am my guts." But she continues, "And I am Lafe's guts" (58). She, like her mother, wrestles with the problem of being alone, wanting it and yet not wanting it. The state of her thought is indicated by "He said I worry more than you do and ... I said You dont know what worry is. I dont know what it is. I dont know whether I am worrying or not. Whether I can or not. I dont know whether I can cry or not. I dont know whether I have tried to or not. I feel like a wet seed wild in the hot blind earth" (57-61). Thus Dewey Dell finds an image for her identity in her pregnancy.33 This is a limited philosophical position indeed, and it is further undermined by her attempts at abortion.

Vardaman--a Brother and a Myth-maker

Vardaman actually does somewhat better at making the initial distinction between himself and the world other than himself. After his mother's death he shapes his own identity problem in this regarding of Jewel's horse:

It is as though the dark were resolving him out of his integrity, into an unrelated scattering of components--snuffings and stampings; smells of cooling flesh and
ammoniac hair; an illusion of a co-ordinated whole of splotched hide and strong bones within which, detached and secret and familiar, an is different from my is. I see him dissolve--legs, a rolling eye, a gaudy splotching like cold flames--and float upon the dark in fading solution; all one yet neither; all either yet none. I can see hearing coil toward him, caressing, shaping his hard shape--fetlock, hip, shoulder and head; smell and sound. I am not afraid. (55)

Having no one to explain death to him, it is not unnatural and certainly not insane of him to confuse his mother and the huge fish he has just caught. His "thoughts" run like this:

It was not her. I was there, looking.
I saw. I thought it was her, but it was not.
It was not my mother. She went away when the other one laid down in her bed and drew the quilt up. She went away. "Did she go as far as town?" "She went further than town."
"Did all those rabbits and possums go further than town?" . . .

... It was not her because it was laying right yonder in the dirt. And now it's all chopped up. I chopped it up. It's laying in the kitchen in the bleeding pan, waiting to be cooked and et. Then it wasn't and she was, and now it is and she wasn't. And tomorrow it will be cooked and et and she will be him and pa and Cash and Dewey Dell and there won't be anything in the box and so she can breathe. (63-64)

He thinks, "My mother is a fish" (79). He goes fishing again. When the coffin is in the water, he thinks, "In the water she could go faster than a man or woman" (144), and urges Darl to catch her. He continues in this illusion, thinking, "She got out through the holes I bored, into the water . . ., and when we come to
the water again I am going to see her. My mother is not in the box. My mother does not smell like that. My mother is a fish" (187). Perhaps he comes closer to accepting the fact when he and Darl listen to their mother inside the coffin. At any rate, after the burial he seems to have forgotten his mother. In the interim he has based his conception of his own identity on that of his brothers and continually reiterated, "Jewel is my brother. . . . I am. Darl is my brother. . . . Cash is my brother." He is finally able to understand that Darl "went to Jackson. He went crazy and went to Jackson both. Lots of people didn't go crazy. Pa and Cash and Jewel and Dewey Dell and me didn't go crazy. We never did go crazy. We didn't go to Jackson either" (241). Faulkner commented on Vardaman's attempt "'to cope with this adult's world which to him was, and to any sane person, completely mad.'" 34 A number of people have commented on the mythological implications of Vardaman's confusing his mother with the fish. His achievement of this type of idealism is, given such circumstances and his young age, rather remarkable.

Addie--a Suicide

When we come to Addie, we come to a character who, unlike the ones we have thus far discussed, has the awareness to take the position of the Absurd Man and
view a meaningless world without resorting to either idealism or suicide. She knows that words are nothing, that deeds are all.

That was when I learned that words are no good; that words don't ever fit even what they are trying to say at. When [Cash] was born I knew that motherhood was invented by someone who had to have a word for it because the ones that had the children didn't care whether there was a word for it or not. I knew that fear was invented by someone that had never had the fear; pride, who never had the pride. . . .

. . . I would think how words go straight up in a thin line, quick and harmless, and how terribly doing goes along the earth, clinging to it, so that after a while the two lines are too far apart for the same person to straddle from one to the other; and that sin and love and fear are just sounds that people who never sinned nor loved nor feared have for what they never had and cannot have until they forget the words. (163-165)

She conceives her own identity, her separate existence, only too well. Some critics see her attempts to enact the deeds of fear, love, motherhood, sin, pride as attempts at communication. They seem to me to be mostly negative attempts to impose her identity on the other. She begins by remembering how her "father used to say that the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time" (161). Finding that her relationship with her pupils is just one in which "we had . . . to use one another by words like spiders dangling by their mouths from a beam, swinging and twisting and never touching, and that only through
the blows of the switch could my blood and their blood flow as one stream" (164), and thinking "that this seemed to be the only way I could get ready to stay dead, I would hate my father for having ever planted me" (162). And so she takes Anse, and sex. But after the birth of Cash she realizes that neither in the bloody communion with her pupils nor by sexual intercourse with Anse had her aloneness been violated. It seems that it is the birth process itself that constitutes the relationship she is looking for because this violation again makes her whole. She seems to resent the onslaught of this violation again, especially as it is another of Anse's children she is to bear, Darl. Her feelings about Darl are hard to comprehend as she first seems to claim him as she does Cash, saying, "I was three now" (165), and "My children were of me alone" (167), but after she has Jewel, she disclaims him along with Dewey Dell and Vardaman. "I gave Anse Dewey Dell to negative Jewel. Then I gave him Vardaman to replace the child I had robbed him of [Cash]. And now he has three children that are his and not mine" (168). Jewel is born of her attempt to make sin a reality, her affair with the Reverend Whitfield. Her revenge on Anse, exacting the promise that he will bury her in Jefferson ironically forcing him to a deed by means of a word, is, I think,
her attempt to make pride a reality; it is an attempt
to impose her identity on the other even after her death.
After this series of what I see as negative attempts
to know and be known, she returns to her father's
statement and prepares to end her desire to know
by death. I think Dr. Peabody is essentially correct
when he says, "She has been dead these ten days. I
suppose it's having been a part of Anse for so long
that she cannot even make that change, if change it be.
I can remember how when I was young I believed death
to be a phenomenon of the body; now I know it to be
merely a function of the mind--and that of the minds of
the ones who suffer the bereavement" (42). Thus I see
her more as the opposite of Anse than as the Absurd Man.

Darl--a Nihilist

In Darl we have the most obvious example of
Existential thought. That he is aware of questions
of existence and essence is apparent in this passage:

In a strange room you must empty yourself for
sleep. And before you are emptied for sleep,
what are you. And when you are emptied for
sleep, you are not. And when you are filled
with sleep, you never were. I dont know what
I am. I dont know if I am or not. Jewel knows
he is, because he does not know that he does not
know whether he is or not. He cannot empty
himself for sleep because he is not what he is
and he is what he is not. Beyond the unlamped
wall I can hear the rain shaping the wagon that
is ours, the load that is no longer theirs that
felled and sawed it nor yet theirs that bought
it and which is not ours either, lie on our
wagon though it does, since only the wind and the rain shape it only to Jewel and me, that are not asleep. And since sleep is is-not and rain and wind are was, it is not. Yet the wagon is, because when the wagon is was, Addie Bundren will not be. And Jewel is, so Addie Bundren must be. And then I must be, or I could not empty myself for sleep in a strange room. And so if I am not emptied yet, I am is. (76)

In this meditation Darl passes from doubt of his own existence to doubt of the existence of anything and back out again through a desperate sort of syllogism to a shaky affirmation of his own existence. He evidently considers himself as a vessel of consciousness. When thought is gone, as in sleep, does he exist at all? Darl contrasts himself with Jewel who, as we have seen, has some kind of unconscious existence. He then considers the existence of the external world. He easily dismisses that of the load of wood because it is possessed by no one, not the sellers, nor the purchasers, nor the mere purveyors. Then he doubts the existence of the wagon itself since, as far as we can know, it exists only in our sensations of it. The wind and rain bring the sound of the wagon's shape to Jewel and Darl. When they are awake, it exists, but does it when they are asleep? This is as far as Darl allows doubt to take him. He violently asserts the existence of the wagon by connecting it with his purpose—taking Jewel away from their mother's deathbedside. He himself, the purposer,
must then also exist. And yet in his last assertion of his existence, we see that it still consists only in consciousness.

Darl continues to posit his own identity in terms of his relationships, but these do not provide as firm a basis for him as they do for Vardaman or even Jewel. We can see the shakiness of this foundation in this exchange with Vardaman:

"Then what is your ma, Darl?" I said.
"I haven't got ere one," Darl said.
"Because if I had one, it is was. And if it is was, it cant be is. Can it?"
"No," I said.
"Then I am not," Darl said. "Am I?"
"No," I said.
I am. Darl is my brother.
"But you are, Darl," I said.
"I know it," Darl said. "That's why I am not is. Are is too many for one woman to foal." (95)

We can see here that it is his mother's rejection of him and favoring of Jewel that is the slim basis of Darl's belief in his own existence.

His conception of the world as absurd seems to follow quite naturally from this identity crisis. "How do our lives ravel out into the no-wind, no-sound, the weary gestures warily recapitulant: echoes of old compulsions with no-hand on no-strings: in sunset we fall into furious attitudes, dead gestures of dolls" (196-197).

Given this recognition Darl would like to make the choice of ending his desire to know by committing
suicide. We can see that in this wish: "If you could just ravel out into time. That would be nice. It would be nice if you could just ravel out into time" (198). But his consciousness remains.

It would be a mistake to judge Darl on his selfish and even cruel actions—his taking Jewel off so neither he nor Addie would have the satisfaction of a last goodbye; his constantly goading Jewel with "Your mother was a horse, but who was your father, Jewel?"; and his lack of sympathy for Dewey Dell. This would be to impose an idealistic standard of morality on Darl in his absurd world. Instead we may see him as not unlike Camus' stranger, Meursault. As Meursault is happy at the realization of the "benign indifference of the universe" and hopes for "howls of execration" from the spectators at his execution, so Darl accepts his incarceration in an asylum as the logical result of his being a sane man in an insane world—a world at whose absurdity he laughs.

**Cash—an Active Existentialist**

But perhaps without being too moralistic we might look for a more committed Existentialist in the book. I believe we can see that character in Cash, whom I think Hyatt H. Waggoner is right in seeing as the most sympathetic character in the book. But some would see Cash as so committed—to the work ethic—as to be an
idealistic, not an Absurd Man. And others see him as only a man of action, without the awareness it takes to qualify as an Absurd Man. The idealism is suggested in negative form when he says, "Because there just aint nothing justifies the deliberate destruction of what a man has built with his own sweat and stored the fruit of his sweat into" (228). And we have already noted his somewhat laughable concern with building the coffin "on the bevel."

But I think most readers would see some growth in Cash through suffering and the perceptive reader can see in Cash's response to that suffering (He finally faints when the veterinarian is setting his leg, and, when they are knocking the concrete off his leg, as Vardaman puts it, he "goes to sleep," and yet he says to Dr. Peabody, "'It never bothered me much.'") that he does not express all he feels. We can find evidence that he shares, all along, the telepathic communication with Darl that Dewey Dell has. As Jewel is urging his horse into the flooded ford, Darl thinks, "When he was born, he had a bad time of it. Ma would sit in the lamp-light, holding him on a pillow on her lap. We would wake and find her so. There would be no sound from them." "'That pillow was longer than him,' Cash says" (137). And I think this passage shows Cash's
doubts about carpentry as an idealism:

But it's a shame, in a way. Folks seems to get away from the olden right teaching that says to drive the nails down and trim the edges well always like it was for your own use and comfort you were making it. It's like some folks has the smooth, pretty boards to build a courthouse with and others don't have no more than rough lumber fitten to build a chicken coop. But it's better to build a tight chicken coop than a shoddy courthouse, and when they both build shoddy or build well, neither because it's one or tother is going to make a man feel the better nor the worse. (224)

Here I think that the "But it's a shame, in a way" refers to the last line of the preceding paragraph where Cash says, "And I reckon they aint nothing else to do with him but what the most folks says is right." The body of this paragraph expresses the idea that the old ideal of pride in one's work is no longer current, and I translate the last part, "Neither when they build both shoddy nor when they build both well is it because the one or the other is going to make a man feel better or worse." Thus I am able to see Cash's "action" as similar to that of Sisyphus, endlessly rolling the rock up the hill.

The most damning criticism of Cash comes from his, "It wasn't nothing else to do. It was either send him to Jackson, or have Gillespie sue us, because he knowed some way that Darl set fire to it" (222). I would argue that Cash's feelings about this are balanced quite ambiguously. His comments on pages 227 and 228 that
"It was bad so. It was bad." could refer to the family's falling on Darl in this way as well as to Darl's burning down the barn. And though Cash's last comment, "I would think what a shame Darl couldn't be to enjoy it too. But it is better so for him. This world is not his world; this life his life" (250), smacks of rationalization, it does show more concern for Darl than anyone else shows, and Cash has already shown us quite a complex understanding of the situation leading to this conclusion.

Sometimes I aint so sho who's got ere a right to say when a man is crazy and when he aint. Sometimes I think it aint none of us pure crazy and aint none of us pure sane until the balance of us talks him that-a-way. It's like it aint so much what a fellow does, but it's the way the majority of folks is looking at him when he does it.

Because Jewel is too hard on him. Of course it was Jewel's horse was traded to get her that nigh to town, and in a sense it was the value of his horse Darl tried to burn up. But I thought more than once before we crossed the river and after, how it would be God's blessing if He did take her outen our hands and get shut of her in some clean way, and it seemed to me that when Jewel worked so to get her outen the river, he was going against God in a way, and then when Darl seen that it looked like one of us would have to do something, I can almost believe he done right in a way. But I dont reckon nothing excuses setting fire to a man's barn and endangering his stock and destroying his property. That's how I reckon a man is crazy. That's how he cant see eye to eye with other folks. And I reckon they aint nothing else to do with him but what the most folks says is right. (223)

And I think we can take Cash's best formulation of the idea as the main key to the book: "But I aint so sho
that ere a man has the right to say what is crazy and what aint. It's like there was a fellow in every man that's done a-past the sanity or the insanity, that watches the sane and the insane doings of that man with the same horror and the same astonishment" (228).

I find Cash's committed Existentialism the most affirmative vision in the book, but by comparing and contrasting the views of all the Bundrens we arrive at the complex vision of the book as a whole, a vision that considers all the aspects of an absurd world and by doing so makes an affirmation. One can make many such comparisons, but among the most significant are these: Anse and Addie can be seen as opposites, Anse as existing in an almost totally unconscious way, Addie as only too aware and so choosing to die. Jewel mediates between them, sharing Anse's lack of awareness and Addie's hateful action. Dewey Dell and Vardaman can be compared both in their attempts to establish identity in relation to others and in their rudimentary myth-making. Darl and Cash can be seen as Existentialists, with Darl leaning toward the resignation of nihilism and Cash bordering on idealism. Comparing Addie to these two sons of hers points up Darl's awareness and Cash's action. If we are not allowed to rest in Cash's Existential view, we can find in the balance of all these views a position like
that of the Absurd Man. I would then argue that the affirmative nature of the book’s folk humor tips the balance toward the comic side. By contrast, the caustic wit of Jason in The Sound and the Fury inclines that book toward the tragic side.\(^{37}\)

**Death on the Installment Plan as Affirmation**

In Louis-Ferdinand Céline’s Death on the Installment Plan it would seem we find the supreme example of nihilism. A presentation of life as death on the installment plan—what more nihilistic idea could there be than that? And the style in which it is presented—a relentless exposure of life’s ugliness down to the vomited up contents of a seasick man’s stomach—what more disgusting conveyance of nihilism could be conceived? And yet it is in just such a driving of life to its extremes that we find the most significant of affirmations of existence, and stripping life of its illusions produces a realism that is driven on into a surrealism that again affirms. As the narrator says, "Things seem pretty crummy, but if they could carry us away with them, we’d die of poetry."\(^{38}\)

**Author, Narrator, and Character**

The book is in a sense autobiography, and tracing the relationship between its author, Louis-Ferdinand Destouches, and its narrator, also named Ferdinand, and
that between the adult narrator and his own child self reveals much about its surrealist method. The author, like his narrator, was a physician who received a wound in the First World War which left him with insomnia, headaches, and a continual roaring in his ears. And it is hard not to associate the narrator's delirious fever with that of the boy Ferdinand. In his fever the boy sees "Madame Méhon, the old battle-ax, was carrying Tom balanced on her hat in among the feathers ... She made him bite everybody who came by" (89). In the boy's delirious image of the family enemy with a turkey on her head we see a paradigm for the way in which the narrator's style and that of his creator works.

"Comic Lyricism"

Such heightening distortion works to produce a style that Céline himself described as "comic lyricism." The sensuousness of his style can be illustrated by these examples: A kiss by an old aunt is described in this way: "It was cold and prickly and then kind of warm at the corner of her mouth; the taste was awful" (48). A more beautiful description is this one of a monumental gate being built: "It was so delicate, so fancy, so full of frills and gingerbread from top to bottom, it made you think of a mountain in bridal dress" (80). A farm house the boy later occupies is described with this succinct
metaphor: "It was a strainer for the cold" (496). The conversation of the mad Father Fleury is graphically described: "You had to catch his words in full flight, the sentences came out in tangled bundles . . . full of knots, garlands, and throwbacks . . . and loose ends that went on forever . . ." (426). And, as a final example, there is this disillusioned simile: "Destiny eats prayers like a toad eats flies . . ." (498). A large contribution to the comic aspect of Céline's style is Rabelaisian plenitude and energy, found not only in the content conveyed by its lowdown language but also in the relentless movement created by its ellipses connections.41

Extremes and Freedom

Through his driving things to extremes and fusing opposites, author, narrator, character, and reader achieve an Existential freedom. Such extremes are seen in the few pages devoted to the narrator's adult situation. He is so annoyed by his patients that he conceives of sending "those pests of mine to the slaughterhouse at La Villette for a good drink of warm blood, first thing in the morning. That ought to knock them out for the day" (16). And yet he has an obvious affection for his somewhat alcoholic colleague, Gustin Sabayot, who sometimes dispenses medicines Santa-Claus-fashion. And he still tells The Legend of King Krogold.
The adult narrator's story of himself as a boy can be divided into three parts--his school and apprentice days, his eight months at another school in England, and his life with Courtial des Pereires. The first phase is characterized by a child's feeling of smallness in a larger world. This description of the schoolyard and his reaction to it typify the whole period. "The kids tried to have a little fun in the yard, but it was pitiful, the wall in front was so high it crushed you, it killed their desire to play. They went back in to struggle for good conduct tokens . . . Hell!" (107). Ferdinand, it is obvious, rebelliously struggles for freedom. This struggle can be seen in his portraits of his father as a paranoid and his mother, only slightly more sympathetically treated, as a masochist. But in pushing to these extreme pictures of his parents, the narrator manages to bring tragic effects together with his comic ones. And we can see how much like his parents the volatile and suffering Ferdinand is. In his description of his father "in full eruption"--"He worked himself into such a lather that his whole head swelled up, he let off jets of steam, and in the end his words exploded like firecrackers" (195-196)--we can see our author's heritage. Though these portraits are in themselves fusions of opposites, there is the further balancing of other
characters who are treated with a more pure gentleness. They include the boy's kind and patient Uncle Édouard and the little stockboy at Berlope's Ribbons and Trimmings, André, with whom he shares King Krogold stories. Events in this period that lend themselves to the kind of surrealistic presentation that makes them horrible and comic at the same time include viewing and participating initiations into bestial sex, a ferocious physical fight with his father, and the scene of mass vomiting aboard a Channel-crossing "pleasure" ship. A bit of it will more than suffice. "One passenger begs for mercy ... He cries out to high heaven that he's empty ... He strains his guts ... And a raspberry comes up after all! ... He examines it, goggle-eyed with horror ... Now he really has nothing left! ..." (124).

The sojourn in England in yet another school approaches satire. This is indicated by the names used. The school, Meanwell College, is run by J. P. and Nora Merrywin and is finally driven out of business by a rival school, Hopeful Academy. Such names are more noticeable in this portion of the book where Ferdinand is an obvious outsider than they are in other parts of the book where we can find, for example, insurance companies named The Connivance Fire Insurance Company (276) and Litigious Life (384). The director of Meanwell College
is treated satirically or at least comically—"Englishmen, you've got to admit, are a funny sight . . . A cross between a pastor and a little boy . . . Everything about them is ambiguous" (230), but his wife, Nora, provides Ferdinand his initiation into erotic sex. And Ferdinand's tenderness is again shown in his treatment of the idiot boy, Jongkind. This section opens with a scene in which the town of Folkestone, its objects, its people, and its language swirl around Ferdinand in a fog. It closes with Nora Merrywin's suicide.

The Assimilative Comic Hero

But the book reaches its comic height in the portion dealing with Courtial des Pereires. Roger-Martin Courtial des Pereires, also known as Jean Marin Courtial des Pereires, whose real name we learn at last is Léon Charles Punais, is an inventor; the owner and editor of a magazine for inventors, the Genitron; an aeronaut whose hot-air balloon is appropriately named the Enthusiast; the author of such works as The Complete Works of Auguste Comte Reduced to the Dimensions of a Positivist Prayer in Twenty-two Acrostic Verses, How to Make Ions, Color Poetry, Poultry Raising at Home, The Story of Polar Voyages from Maupertuis to Charcot, and Electricity Without a Bulb; a racing car driver; an astronomer; the director of the Eureka Research Center; a radio-telluric farmer; teacher and headmaster of the
"Rencvated Familistery for the Creation of a New Race"; a liar; a clown; a devil—clearly a perfect example of the assimilative comic hero. His philosophy is certainly the regnant one both in and of the book: "Great instinctive disorder is the father of fertile thoughts!" (339). With it, we may really believe, "Courtial is going to crush, to tame, to chain, to subjugate rebellious Fortune!" (495). He rises phoenix-like, or rather Pierrot-like, out of the dust of the apocalyptic destruction of the Genitron headquarters by a cloud of angry inventors using a diving bell as a battering ram, and goes on to establish his farm and school in the country. Here at last is a school where kids get enough to eat and where they are truly emancipated. These kids supply the table by raiding the neighborhood larders.

**Affirmation in the Face of Death**

But when arrests reduce the school's population to seven and when the radio-telluric potato crop turns out to be chock-full of grubs, Courtial commits suicide by putting a double-barrel shotgun in his mouth and blowing his head off. It is in the very blood and gore of Ferdinand's description of Courtial's body that I think we find how such a confrontation with ultimate reality can be at the same time an affirmation. In Ferdinand's
concentration on the body itself—"It was like hash on a skewer . . . shreds, chunks, and sauce . . . "—we see, we feel his intense feelings for Courtial and for life. After helping his wife remove Courtial's body from the road to which it had frozen and after packing off the school's remaining kids, Ferdinand comments, "That day, honestly, take it from me, was one of the rottenest in my whole life. Balls!" (539). His reaction to Courtial's death, like that of Madame des Pereires, is delayed. In seeing her through her reaction to the death, in which she rages at the gendarmes her complaints against Courtial, throws herself on the mutilated body begging his forgiveness, gently wraps his remains in a piece of his old balloon, the Archimedes, and cannot tear herself away from the terrible thought of his suicide, Ferdinand reveals the other side of the ranting personality, something like his father's, that she had displayed throughout the Courtial section of the book. It is not until Ferdinand gets back to his Uncle Édouard that he can finally let go. Then, despite his uncle's kind teasing, he cannot stop crying.

The affirmation achieved here is, I believe, representative of comedy's highest achievement.
CONCLUSION

What conclusions can be drawn from this study in the aesthetics of comedy? The Harrison-Murray-Cornford idea that comedy, like tragedy, arose out of ritual seems confirmed. But this process is not a one-time thing; rather, it is a continual process as man confronts a situation, devises a strategy to encompass that situation, and then represents that strategy in an art form. Burke's conception of literature as symbolic action is confirmed by Piaget, Trilling, Freud, and Barber.

Comedy's Doubleness

Bergson's conception of the double structure of the laughable holds up well as a description of the basic form of comedy, though this doubleness is not always the contrast between the human and the mechanical, as he suggests. A more inclusive analysis of this doubleness is that it consists of deviation from a norm, with the deviation, not the final return to the norm, exciting the laughter.

Comedy as Play

Piaget's explanation of play shows it to be a useful analogy for comedy, one that would have improved
Bergson's and Freud's conceptions of comedy. His definition of play as behavior oriented toward the pole of assimilation as opposed to imitation, which is behavior oriented toward the pole of accommodation, help us to understand both symbolic play, which comedy resembles, and games with rules, which are related to normal social functioning.

**Comedy as Escape from Repression**

Comedy may be seen as a return to assimilative play, but it is a return *from* the accommodation demanded by adult social life. Freud indicates how this rebellious act takes place. His explanation that the pleasure in tendentious jokes arises from an economy in expenditure of psychical energy on inhibition is convincing. But rather than finding the saving of energy as the factor common to tendentious jokes, innocent jokes, the comic, and humor, I maintain that it is inhibition in various forms that is the common factor. As the pleasure in tendentious jokes arises from a triumph over the inhibition of aggression, so the pleasure in innocent jokes and the comic arises from a triumph over the demands of reason, and the pleasure in humor from a triumph over the impositions of reality.
Comedy as Affirmation

Both comedy and tragedy center on conflict between the individual and society. How, then, can comedy be distinguished from tragedy? Langer suggests the answer when she describes the comic rhythm as that of ongoing life and the tragic rhythm as that of life pointed toward its end. A tragedy focuses on its ending and moves inexorably toward it; a comedy's ending often seems arbitrary, a mechanically imposed limit to the fun. But this does not mean that comedy cannot face the challenge of death. It can meet this challenge, as it meets other inhibitory forces, with its rebellious affirmation of the self and of life. Comic affirmation can even withstand the pressure of a meaningless world and keeps on questioning.

What is the basic form of comedy? We have found it to be a doubleness, a contrariety in unity, a tension between deviation and a norm. What is the nature of the comic response? It is assimilative self-assertion rather than accommodative adaptation. It is rebellion against restraints of all kinds. It is affirmation of life in the face of meaninglessness and eventual death.
FOOTNOTES

INTRODUCTION

1 (New York, 1957).

2 (London, 1918).


4 (Garden City, N. Y., 1961).

5 For an enumeration of such objections, see Theodor H. Gaster's introduction to the Anchor Books edition of The Origin of Attic Comedy (Garden City, N. Y., 1961), pp. xxiii-xxvi.


10 Bergson, p. 105.


13 Ibid., p. 225.


16 Sewell, p. 4.


18 (New York, 1931).

19 Jokes, p. 138n.

20 Ibid., p. 118.


CHAPTER 1

1 Bergson, pp. 127-133.

2 Ibid., pp. 142-143.

3 Ibid., p. 150.

4 Meredith, pp. 42-43.

5 Ibid., p. 44.

6 Jokes, p. 236.

7 Collected Papers, pp. 216-218.

8 Bergson, p. 63.
9Ibid., p. 79.


12John Dryden, The Conquest of Granada Part I & Part II, in Dryden: The Dramatic Works, Vol. III, ed. Montague Summers (London, 1932), pp. 1-176. Exact references will be given in the text by part (1st or 2nd), act (in uppercase Roman numerals), and scene (in lowercase Roman numerals) (though many of the scenes are not numbered). The lines are not numbered and so cannot be specified.


14Bergson, pp. 133-139.


17Hamlet (II, ii, 90).


20(Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1953), p. 60.


23Twain, pp. 83-84.

24Jokes, pp. 96-102, 117-119.

25Bergson, p. 83.

Meredith, p. 10.

Bergson, pp. 109-110.


Bergson, p. 150.

Ibid., p. 154.


For a television show entitled "The Great American Novel," which indicated the relevance of works like Babbitt and The Grapes of Wrath, seen on a San Francisco station April 9, 1968, and repeated since, I believe.

Collected Papers, pp. 216-221.


Sterne, p. 385.

(New York, 1962), p. 47. Further page references will be given parenthetically in the text.

Bergson, p. 174.
CHAPTER 2

1 Bergson, p. 105.
2 Ibid., p. 104.
3 Ibid., p. 105.
4 Ibid., p. 181.
5 Ibid., p. 186.
6 Ibid., p. 181.
7 Jokes, pp. 222-223, quoting Bergson, p. 104.
8 Ibid., p. 227.
9 Collected Papers, pp. 218-221.
10 Jokes, pp. 227-228.
12 Jokes, p. 227.
13 Piaget, pp. 147-168.
14 Groos, pp. 384-385.
15 Burke, p. 3.
16 Rourke, pp. 98-99.
18 Ibid., p. 43.
19 Piaget, pp. 89-146.
20 Sewell, p. 27.
21 Ibid., pp. 188-189.
22 Ibid., p. 6.
23 Huizinga, pp. 5, 13-27.
24 Ibid., p. 13.
25 Ibid., p. 7.
26 Groos, pp. 389-395.
28 Plessner, pp. 76-80.
29 Ibid., pp. 139-142.
30 Ibid., p. 80.
31 Ibid., p. 113.
32 Ibid., pp. 80-107.
33 Ibid., pp. 139-142.
36 Jokes, pp. 189-194.
37 Dr. Ruth Hirsch Weir, Language in the Crib, quoted in Malmstrom, p. 47.
39 Jokes, pp. 125-128.
40 Piaget, pp. 182-193, 170, 198-199.
41 Jokes, pp. 205-208.
43 As I Lay Dying (New York, 1957), p. 182. Further page references will be given parenthetically in the text.
44 Barber indicates in his book, p. 150, how this is in character for Bottom. Before reading this, I thought perhaps the speeches had gotten reversed and that Bottom should be the one to suggest using a symbol for what could be there in reality.
CHAPTER 3

1 Jokes, pp. 16-89. Further page references will be given parenthetically in the text.


3 Plessner, p. 80.

4 Ibid., p. 91.

5 Piaget, p. 208, quoting A. Binet.

6 Ibid., pp. 208-209.

7 Ibid., p. 203.

8 Collected Papers, pp. 215-221.

9 Freud speaks of the "unconscious" rather than the "id," but the latter term seems justified here.

10 Frye, pp. 163-186.


13 The mixing of the features of these two holidays as well as their various possible locations in the year--springtime, harvest-time, and Christmas--may well be the product of the overlay of Christianity on fertility myth. While Dionysus died in the winter, Christ was born in that season, and while Dionysus was reborn in the spring, Christ both died and was resurrected in that season.


15 Ibid., p. 193.

16 Ibid., pp. 16-17.
CHAPTER 4

1 Langer, pp. 326-350. Direct quotations will be referenced by page numbers given parenthetically in the text.

2 Modern Tragicomedy: An Investigation into the Nature of the Genre (New York, 1966). Direct quotations will be referenced by page numbers given parenthetically in the text.


McKillop, pp. 203-204.


Ibid., p. 21.

Symbolism and American Literature (Chicago, 1953), pp. 186-212.


Partridge's Dictionary of Slang indicates that around 1830 "ring the changes" meant the exchange of bad money for good; so says Hennig Cohen in "Wordplay on Personal Names in the Writings of Herman Melville," Tennessee Studies in Literature, VIII (1963), 91.


22. Franklin, p. 182.


27. TSSL, III (Summer 1961), 251-258.


31. As I Lay Dying (New York, 1957), p. 234. Further references will be given parenthetically in the text.


33. An interpretation suggested by Volpe.


37 There have been numerous reasons given for the pairing of The Sound and the Fury and As I Lay Dying, from Faulkner's own comment, recorded in Faulkner in the University, that "the two of them together made exactly enough pages to make a proper-sized book that the publisher could charge the regulation price on"; through the noting of their similar technique; even to the matching of character with character, Darl with Quentin, for instance. I think this last comparison more limiting than productive, and I would suggest, to counter Mr. Faulkner's undercutting comment, that as the books were written one after the other such a comparison of underlying philosophy would be valid in any case. I might further suggest here, following a suggestion of Walter Brylowski in his book Faulkner's Olympian Laugh: Myth in the Novels (Detroit, 1968), p. 96, that the novel following these, Sanctuary, takes the comic vision through the tragic to the demonic, and that the next novel after it, Light in August, provides a balance again though its comedy and tragedy are more juxtaposed than blended.

38 Trans. Ralph Manheim (New York, 1966), p. 31. Further page references will be given parenthetically in the text.

39 Preface by the translator, pp. v, vii.

40 Ibid., p. viii.

41 Ibid., p. x.